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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

TIRUVACHAKAM

THE HINDU TESTAMENT OF LOVE

Ratna Navaratnam

GENERAL EDITORS

K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

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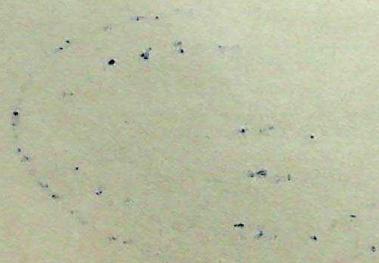

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आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.

—*Rigveda*, 1-89-i

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General Editors:
K. M. MUNSHI
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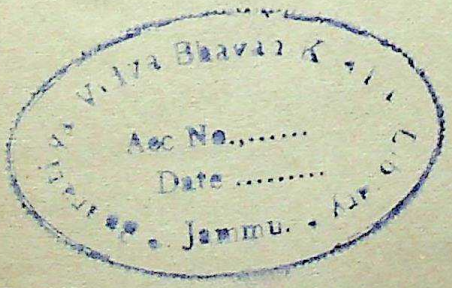
TIRUVACHAKAM
THE HINDU TESTAMENT OF LOVE

BY

RATNA NAVARATNAM



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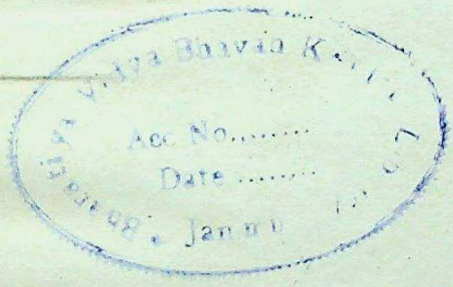

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BY

RATNA NAVARATNAM

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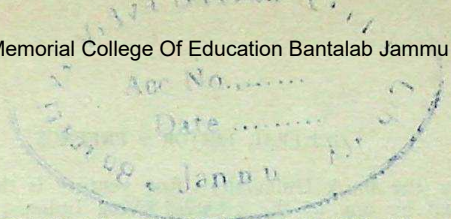

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2|-.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting itself to the utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions that allow him freedom to evolve along lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspirations which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books from other literatures of the world if they illustrate the principle we stand for will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, besides the movements of the Indian mind, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

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Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita*, by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who does not know it does not know the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas the climax of which is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone, the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

Queen Victoria Road,
NEW DELHI:
October 3, 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

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PREFACE

St. Manikkavachakar's Tiruvachakam is a great poem of sublime beauty and forms the subject of an inexhaustible study. Few feats of the human mind have equalled that of Manivachakar's expression of an absolute Love and faith in God, man, and the world and of translating such joy into exquisite poesy. In order to interpret this Poem of poems, this Testament of Love, we found it essential to formulate an acceptable general Idea of Great Poetry, gleaned from the theories of poetry advanced by the seers of East and West, and then proceeded to interpret the essence of the beauty of thought and diction embodied in each section of this wondrous Poem.

The work of translating this poetry of 'Incantation' has never been an easy one and attempts have been made by many reputed scholars to translate the stanzas of Tiruvachakam from Tamil into English. In our translation, we have tried to render in terms of feeling rather than of intellect, those profound experiences of the poet whose communication to our minds depends on all our relevant feelings and impulses being raised into the completest harmony. In the absence of an adequate terminology of feeling, we were compelled to adapt the static intellectual terms to the dynamic realities of feeling. For a fuller appreciation of Tiruvachakam, readers are requested to refer to standard editions like Dr. Pope's monumental work on Tiruvachakam. References which are made in our work to the cantos and poems in Tiruvachakam follow also the pattern and order adopted in standard editions both in Tamil and English of Tiruvachakam.

In our study of Tiruvachakam, we have tried to show that an approach through the Muse of Poesy can bring new light to bear upon the great issues that appear in religious experiences. The ascent of the soul from the human to the divine, from time to the eternal, from the many to the one—in short the varied spiritual experiences of the pilgrim seer—are interpreted by the emotional symbolism liberated by the

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power of Manikkavachakar's poetry. We have sought to follow the avenues where the intense expression of religious feeling is indissolubly linked with the wider connection of emotion in poetry.

An approach has also been made to understand the soul of St. Manikkavachakar by means of his poem. In the perfection of its fine poetry into which we impersonally enter, we behold the perfection of all things and are one with that perfection. Poetry is a fine medium to pay homage to the absolute truth and the reality of the truth makes a sovereign claim upon poetry that it may well be said that great experience gives rise to great poetry. Thus in Tiruvachakam, all that is offered to the sum of perfection has both the unity of inspiration and the sublime grace of art.

In attempting to write on the Poem of Eternal Love, we have no other apology than the one which St. Sekkilar advanced.

"Though impossible to reach its limits,
Insatiable love drives me to the task."

This book is dedicated to my father Sangara Pillai Chelliah whose inspiring devotion to his Guru, led me step by step to find the master key to enter the undiscovered domain of St. Manikkavachakar and to realise the reality of this God-Guru in my life.

RATNA NAVARATNAM

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THE POETRY OF TIRUVACHAKAM

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CHAPTER I

THE ESSENCE OF GREAT POETRY

Poetry has been defined as a perfection of experience and an inspired realisation by the great poets of East and West. The end of Poetry according to Aristotle is to present life and to establish the true connection of things. Life for Aristotle is matter striving for form. In his Poetics, he speaks of art as imitating nature. According to Plato, art is born out of man's natural impulse to beauty, love, truth, wisdom and goodness. In 'Phaedrus', he states that 'absolute beauty is recognised as a supersensuous and spiritual essence which is discerned by the mind when thrown into ecstasy in its presence'. The artist realises the eternal and infinite Beauty and can therefore create forms of beauty more beautiful than are found in the outer world. In 'Symposium', Plato elaborates this idea. "If a man has eyes to see the true beauty, he becomes the friend of God and immortal". He defines Love as 'the instinct of immortality in a mortal creature'. Greek philosophy springs from poetry of this order and in Greek poetry are contained the classics of aesthetic doctrine for the western world.

Dante calls a poet 'a scribe of eternal love', and Tolstoy believes that great poetry is the resonance of greatness of soul. Matthew Arnold supports the view that poetry is a criticism of life. The Poet is the prophet of the world's final causes; the interpreter of a creation groaning and travailing after its proper meanings. In his inimitable way Milton has said, "He who likes to write on laudable things ought himself to be a true poem". Shelley was of the opinion that "Whatever in the world has any worth is an expression of Love. Love sometimes talks. Love talking musically is poetry". Wordsworth emphasised that "Poetry was emotion recollected in tranquillity".

The ancient Indian bards affirm that "art is the expression of aesthetic experience". Art should from the poet's point of view transform his experience into expression and from

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the recipient's point of view transform his expression into experience. Dhananjaya in his Dasarupa says: 'Nothing is there in the world which when touched by the imagination of the poet and men of taste does not become rasa'. Bhamaha's Kavyalankara, one of the earliest Indian work of Poetics, defines poetry thus: "The Gunas constitute riti which is the *soul* of poetry; Alamkara means the embellishments and figures of speech and form the *body* of poetry."

Bhoja speaks of poetry or 'kavya', as 'sabda' and 'artha' (word and sense) united. Sahitya is the relation between 'sabda and artha' and rasa is the essence of 'sabda and artha' in poetry. The external form of the poem is known as Kavya Sarira and consists of alamkaras and lakshanas, while the essential spirit of poetry is known as 'rasa'. 'Kavyam tu rasavad vakyam'— The sentence which has 'rasa' is poetry. So said Visvanatha, the author of Sahitya Darpana. Sri Sankaracharya interprets Kavi (poet) as meaning — "Krantharsi" — one who sees far, wide and deep and knows the truth of things. The poet sees the infinite Truth in his most exalted moods and gives form and expression to his realisation. This ideal of poesy wherein song and realisation become one in joy, is of the essence of Indian conception of the mission of art.

There are some literary critics who take up the view that Indian Poetry aims at the direct expression of moral perfection and is didactic in its presentment of pleasure. A reading of Thevaram, Tiruvachakam, Diviya Prabantham, gives an exalted pleasure that a didactic poem cannot achieve. The test of pure poetry is that it gives us the rapture of pure experience, without having so much to rely on any external judgment of truth or morality. Tholkappiar in the section on Poetics, considers that a sincere response to poetry lies in the communication of the essential experience of the poet to his readers, wherein all relevant feelings and impulses are brought into completest harmony. The specific function of poetry has therefore been to influence the feelings and to awaken emotion. Tholkappiam, the ancient classic of the Tamils, defines poetry as the "metrical expression of a realised aesthetic delight". The poet's main purpose is the communication of such delight to others.

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Poetry implies passion and as every passion has its proper pulse, so will it have its characteristic modes of expression. As far as the metre acts, it tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility of the reader's feelings and gives greater intensity to the language. The practice of the best poets of all countries, in all ages, shows that there is essential difference of style, though not of words, between the language of prose and that of poetry.

"What is poetry"? inquired Coleridge and he said that it involved the question of "What is a Poet"? For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind. The poet brings the whole soul of man into activity with the subordination of its faculties to each other. He creates an atmosphere of harmony that blends into a spirit of unity by the magical power of imagination. This power first put into action by the will and understanding reveals itself in the reconcilement of discordant qualities, the sameness with difference, the admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

Thus all great poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, passions, emotions and language.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN POETRY AND RASA

What is the place of 'Meypadu' or rasa, in other words, emotional realisation in all great poetry? Leo Tolstoy in his Essay on Art defines the activity of art as 'one of transmitting a *feeling* one has once experienced'. Valmiki also held the same view. The sloka metre in sanskrit has its origin in an incident in the life of Valmiki which incidentally reveals also his view on the origin of Indian poetry.

When Valmiki went to collect sacrificial wood and grass, he saw a pair of kraunca birds singing merrily on the branch of a tree. Suddenly he heard a sound and the male bird

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fell down, shot by a hunter. The poet witnessed the bird breathing its last, while the bereaved *mate* from the branch sent forth an agonising shriek that pierced the heart of the sage with deep sorrow. He gave expression to the intensity of his grief in the now famous sloka in Sanskrit — Manisada. That which emanated from Valmiki who was smitten with grief was measured, musical poetry. This incident caught Valmiki's imagination so forcibly that it stirred the instinct of pathos to the depths and raised it to a climax of emotion. That which came out of the feeling of sadness was poetry — spontaneous expression of an intense feeling of pathos. Valmiki, thus gifted with vision and blessed with divine intuition, conceived the great epic of Ramayana in a state of divine inspiration.

Aesthetic enjoyment proceeds from an emotional rather than from an intellectual source. "That is poetry by which the reader is infected with the feelings of the poet and is one with him", said Tolstoy in his Essay on Art. The same theory is put forward by Bharata, the Indian poet, in his definition of Rasa. Rasa means the aesthetic pleasure or joy that an intelligent and responsive audience experiences when reading a great poem. In poetry its realisation is always pleasant. What is called Rasa in Sanskrit and "Meypadu" in Tamil, is an experience of bliss unconditioned by any name, a certain blissful state of one's mind, which is a quality (guna) of the mind. Mammata defines rasas in Kavya Prakasha thus: "What are known in ordinary language as causes, effects, and auxiliaries of the latent emotion of love and the like come to be spoken of as excitants, ensuants, and variants, when found in poetry. When the latent emotion comes to be manifested by these, it is known as Rasa".

When these causes, effects, and auxiliaries of the emotional states known as Vibhavas, Anubhavas, and Vyabhicaribhavas pass through the crucible of a creative poet's mind and appear newly fashioned in a poem, the dormant emotional state of the reader is kindled to such a degree, that the reader through his imaginative sympathy attunes himself to what is represented. This climax of emotion reveals itself in a state of blissful consciousness. This bliss is rasa. The feelings of the poet and the reader become united and at the

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final stage, it is the feelings of the reader that are realised in a state of bliss.

The aim of Indian poetry is the realisation of this rasa, and the activity of the poet consists in the selection, representation and harmonious blending of such Vibhavas, Anubhavas, and Vyabhicaribhavas as would lend themselves most naturally to the development and realisation of this rasa. Every one of the characteristics of poetry must therefore be related to and directed towards the realisation of this rasa. Bharata considered as rasas those emotions which were masters (Svamibhutas) and were attended upon by minor ones called bhavas. The early aesthetic literature of India reveals to us the recognition of eight classical rasas. They are joy, humour, pathos, anger, heroism, fear, loathsomeness and wonder. The same classification is given by Tholkappiar in his work on Poetics, under the sub-section of "Meypattial",

Each rasa has its own particular sphere of application. Rasas are certain objective values of life and thought; and these are the values which we apprehend or realise in higher immediacy. These aesthetic experiences lead to the realisation of values inherent in Reality. Reality is comprehended by us in and through these experiences that constitute human life. All aesthetic values participate in the beautiful. Hence we have to find out that principle which is immanent in all aesthetic values, because of which an individual has a glimpse of the beautiful.

Bharata notices a 'kama' for every 'purusartha', so that we have a 'Mokshakama' which is a blend of attachment and detachment. It is a phase of experience which transcends love and is best rendered as the mystic's passion for reunion with the divine. This passion sublimates love to higher and more impersonal ends, and the psychology of religious consciousness reveals the existence of Bhakti Rasa, as has been manifested in the tuneful poetry of the religious bards, Alwars, and Saiva saints of South India. The aesthetic state evoked by this divine love is 'Santa'. It is an experience evoked from an irresistible urge to realise oneness with reality and is also called 'moksa rati' or the love of beatitude. Likewise Bharata speaks of 'Dharma Srngara' which is a love of righteousness. It is an expression of the Good. The

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aesthetic embodiment is an expression of the system of reality which is the Good. Thus all the best that there is in the universe is sifted and winnowed into the world of poetry. It offers a knowledge of Reality. Such a representation is apprehended by us in and through the various aesthetic values. The universe as the aesthetic imagination apprehends it, is grasped completely only under the principle of Beauty which is called Santa (vide Abhinava Bharati 1.5).

The apprehension of Truth is the realisation of bliss. The knowledge dispels falsehood and leads to the removal of imperfections. This stage brings forth the rejection of all desires. The absence of desire puts an end to sorrow and pain. Then alone one can hope to experience a state of harmony. Thus Santa embodies the highest state of spiritual existence, and is always a development from within. If knowledge of Truth is very essential to this state, then it alone can be the basis of experience. It is in this background that we would interpret the gems of Tiruvachakam, and all great poetry of the East and West. This apprehension of Truth is in reality, the realisation of the Self. Such consciousness alone can be the nucleus of all aesthetic experience and Santa is the synonym of this experience. In other words, the basis of Santa is in the apprehension of Truth. The knowledge of Truth is the knowledge of Self, leading to the consciousness of the Supreme Being — Pati. In explaining the aesthetic experience in terms of this consciousness, we are in the main attempting to interpret primarily the development of the soul of Saint Manikkavachakar. His was an ascent from discord and strife to the experience of harmony and non-dual relationship with the supreme Sivam. It is beyond the logical categories of thought.

It is this nature that fails to be revealed through the medium of the arts, since all media are finite. As a result, the aesthetic presentation becomes highly suggestive and all aesthetic values accordingly suggest that which is at the very core. This vital element is Santa. "Self-consciousness" (Atma-Jnana) is the basis of Santa. This self-consciousness is Sama and is the principle of all experience. Thus we find all aesthetic experience converging on Sama, which has its

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nisus in the philosophic experience of the whole. It is the experience that fills the soul with the essence of wholeness. It is a state of existence which transcends pleasure and pain, good and evil. When all passions and impulses are purged from the soul, then we have this type of existence.

In the poetic experience, one is conscious of universal satisfaction. Such a satisfaction is awakened by the words, songs, and music which lifts the individual above the empirical plane of existence. It is an intense comprehensive experience of self-consciousness, which makes itself felt as an irradiating ecstasy. Such harmonious realisation of self-consciousness unfolds in the aesthetic experience known as Santa, and is therefore distinct from aesthetic values. It is an experience that is full of ecstasy. At the human level, it affirms itself as rapture or Srngara. This positive Srngara is followed by a negative one called humour or hasya. The transitive reference of these two states give rise to the compassionate karuna or pathos, anger or heroism, which in turn evoke feelings of disgust, fear or awe.

It is this Santa rasa that pervades the content and expression contained in the immortal masterpiece of Tiruvachakam. What the reader is expected to do is to recreate and relive this significant form of existence. The aesthetic experience which is an intense realisation of reality as consciousness, has the form and quality of "Sattva", and the chief characteristic of the expression of Santa turns out to be "Madurya", which is an ecstatic feeling of satisfaction. This Madurya involves the transmutation of the self. The transformation of the self takes place in the higher immediacy of which Santa is the representative in the aesthetic universe.

The poets of India found greater satisfaction in the expression of the majesty, beauty, and love of God, than in the expression of natural or human beauty, in that it fulfils even better the real function of art as an ever new revealer of ever new loveliness, and ever generous giver of delight and dispeller of grief. We find in the greatest poetry of India this element of revelation, of reminiscence, and of kinship to the eternal beauty of God. Mammata in Kavya Prakasha brings out these three elements of creativeness, sweetness, and spiritual bliss in his definition of the aim, source and kind of

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poetry. In Srimad Bhagavata is expressed this idea: "The singing of the glory of God is the revealing of ever new and ever radiant Beauty, the bestowal of eternal and matchless bliss on the heart, and the destroyer of the engulfing depth of human grief, sorrow and pain".

Sivaprakasa Swamigal in his paean of praise on Tiruvachakam refers to the author in inimitable lines:

"The quintessence of poesy is contained
In thy poem Tiruvachakam, beloved of Vathavur."

CHAPTER III

HOW IS THE SPIRIT OF POETRY REVEALED?

The universal appeal of poetry is revealed by some of the world's greatest poets in their masterpieces, and East and West vie with one another in giving a local habitation and a name to the blissful state of enjoyment emanating from the Muse of Poetry.

"O honey maker! we are undone by our
Search about the truth of things.
You are the happy being as you seek
Bliss in preference to knowledge.

— *Kalidasa* — *"Shakuntala"*.

"Man arrives at the notion of absolute Beauty.
.....If he has eyes to see the true beauty,
He becomes the friend of God and immortal".

—*Plato*—*Symposium*.

"Art conducts us from the vestibule of Reality
into the innermost shrine and reveals the
transcendental to our vision".

—*Schelling*.

"There is no repose except in the absolute, the
infinite and the divine".

— *Amiel*.

"For faithful guide unto my labouring heart
Beauty was given me at birth....

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She lifts to heaven hearts that truly know
But eyes grown dim with pain
From mortal to immortal cannot go
Nor without grace of God look up again".

— *Dante.*

"Truth and goodness and beauty
are but different faces of the Same All".

— *Emerson.*

"In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not, in enjoyment expired".

— *Wordsworth.*

"A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath, the heart
Stood up and answered, 'I have felt' ".

— *Tennyson* — *"In Memoriam".*

"Tis only as a singer I can come before Thee. Lord".

— *Tagore.*

These declarations of poets show that they have seen deeper than most men of the world into the inter-relations of Beauty, Truth and Joy. We recognise great and pure poetry as 'incantation', the confluence of all kinds of life into a single flame of consciousness, asserting its 'luminous unity' over all the powers of its poetic world.

Poetry sheds its lustre when it offers us a refuge and an interpretation of life. "All that I beheld *respired* with inward meaning". Thus Wordsworth expresses the universal appeal of the muse of poesy in these inimitable lines:

"That blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery
In which the heavy and weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened".....
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things".

— *Tintern Abbey.*

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The spirit of Poetry is revealed in the lives of the poets. In Tiruvachakam, that great poem of ruby utterances, St. Manikkavachakar clothes in the language of poesy his beliefs as well as the religious faith of his people. But he expresses it as a poetic experience which is universal in its appeal. His master skill as a poet lies in making out of the Tamil language and the effects of that language embracing its sound and sense, a reliable symbol of his experience; and the readers in whatever clime and age understand the symbol as corresponding to the original experience of the poet.

In all great poetry the bards are moved to express themselves — not merely their passing moods, but the whole style of their personal experiences — the totality of their being and becoming. We see them revealed in all their strivings, resentments, indignation, pity, love and courage. Kalidasa's Cloud Messenger, Tiruvalluvar's Kural, Virgil's Aenead, Nammalvar's Psalms, Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, Tagore's Gardener, not only represent a type of grand style in the poetic universe but also of the grand style in man's commerce with his destiny.

Again the soul of poesy is also revealed by its subject. There is almost nothing in the whole realm of human experience which has not at one time or another been treated in a poetic way. However, the most fundamental of aesthetic and religious concepts is Ananda or Bliss. That bliss is the innermost core of beings, has been affirmed in many an Indian classic in the realm of poesy, music, painting and sculpture. The subject of Tiruvachakam can be summed up in this one line from the Temple Lyric: 22. 1.

> "Thou who transcends all happy states without end,
> .....oh bliss ineffable".

In Taittiriya Upanishad is the significant saying:

> "All living beings are born from Bliss. Having been born, they live in and by Bliss. On departing, they enter into Bliss.
> III, 6.

The great religious poets and bards of India have immortalised in strains of poesy, this blissful core of Being, so lucidly explained in the Taittiriya Upanishad: (II.5).

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"Even subtler than the element of intellect is the element of bliss. Of it, the joy or *priya* caused by the *experience* of beautiful and enjoyable things is the head. The finer joy or *moda* caused by the *enjoyment* of beautiful and enjoyable things is the right wing. The intenser joy or *pramoda* caused by the *expression* of beautiful and enjoyable things is the left wing. The element of *bliss* which is the common constitutent of priya, moda and pramoda is its *Atma* or *Soul*. *Brahma* the Oversoul is its *eternal basis* and sustaining support".

Finally, the spirit of poesy is revealed in the enchantment of form or expression. The perfection of diction of the world's greatest poets forms one of the marvels of the poetic art. In the prosody of the East and West, great importance is attached to the major alamkara or figure of speech known as simile. The essence of a simile is similitude and similes not only illustrate but also vivify the subject matter. Allusions familiar through the historic and literary sources embellish the imagery and add charm to their poetry. Simple, common words become charged with power and significance and the readers too, with the poets, begin to see eternity in a grain of sand or a blade of grass.

The singular charm of Indian Poesy lies in its intimate association with music, and herein the spirit of Tiruvachakam as great poetry stands revealed. Ilanko Adigal in his classical Tamil poem, 'Silappadikaram', has defined the close connection of poetry with music. The vibration of the instrument 'Yal' gives birth not only to melody but also to pure poetry. What Sri Suka said about Narada and his music, can be applied to all great poets. "This divine sage is indeed a happy man full of inner affluence as he sings the glory of the Lord, and singing gets mad with love of the Lord, and then fills with the ecstasy of the music of his strings the weary and joyless world".

The innate sweetness of the message communicated by the poetic seers of India can best be experienced when their poems are rendered in musical forms. In South India is the tradition of assigning the different ragas to the different times of the day and seasons, and it seems to be primarily based

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upon the emotional significance of the particular ragas. The raga 'Bhupala' produces, for instance, a very touching effect, if it is sung before sunrise. The Morning Hymn, sung in 'Bhupala raga' gives a very echo to the seat where love is throned.

The essence of Tiruvachakam can best be imbibed through the appropriate media of music. The crescendo and diminuendo of sounds and rhythm, the ebb and flow of melody weave a spell of harmony divine, that enthralled by its music, a tuneful lover of this poem exclaimed: "He who is not moved to soulful bliss by Tiruvachakam will not be moved by anything else". In many a Tiruvachaka ode, as in "Tiru Ammanai", or in "Tirupotsunnam", poetry and music mingle in the style of Greek poetry where the chorus usually resorts to music. In the 'Song of Victory', we get the melody of language responding to the symphony of the soul in an effort to penetrate the veil of sublimity.

We thought an interpretation of the theory of great poetry in general would help all who read Tiruvachakam to appreciate this Poem as a lofty expression of loftiest human experience. The world's great poems speak the language of immortality and hence stand the test of literary excellence and philosophic criticism of all ages, climes and creeds. The theories of Tholkappiar or Bharata, Aristotle or Plato, Coleridge or Tolstoy, Tagore or Bridges raise no conflicting issues as we have seen, but promote a common accepted standard of excellence in Great Poetry, by which universal key, we can unravel the true spirit of Tiruvachakam.

We have also shown clearly that a great work of art must not solely be judged by the aesthetic and moral standards of the country of its birth. When we read the works of Kalidasa or Dante's Divine Comedy, Plato's Symposium or Ibsen's Brand, Nakkirar's Tirumurugatrupadai or Thevaram Lyrics, we begin to understand the motives which impelled them to express themselves as they did, and do not question their particular system of belief or their customs. In order to enjoy these poems, we need not subscribe to the way of life held dear by Kalidasa or the Catholic theology of Dante, for they compel us to feel their inspiration apart from the variants of a particular age or country. All lovers of poetry

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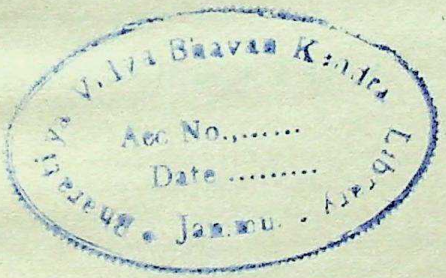
enjoy Blake's "Songs of Innocence" and Goethe's "Faust". So too will they be attracted to Tiruvachakam and with Keats share in the light that ne'er was on sea or land:

"An awful warmth about my heart, like a load
Of immortality leading us to august retreats
Where awaits us a presence more than human".

We discover in the great poems of India, an echo of the magnificence of Divine Love and ecstatic Bliss of poets who were also pilgrims par excellence. Those who are susceptible to the effect of Poetry will *feel* in the reading of all great poems, an all-embracing perfection which cannot be expressed in words. "It is a spirit. It comes we know not whence. It will not speak at our bidding nor answer in our language. It is not our servant, it is our master".



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TIRUVACHAKA RAJYA

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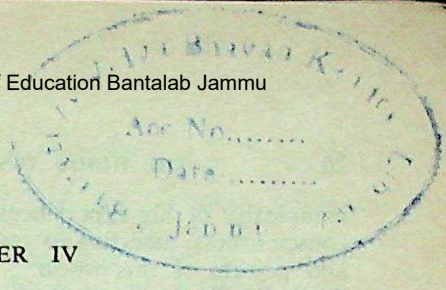

CHAPTER IV

THE KINGDOM OF LOVE

If poetry is the 'resonance of greatness of soul', Tiruvachakam stands unchallenged as one of the finest gems of poetry in the literature of the world. Some have found in it as did Ramalinga Swami Adigal, an expression of their personal faith. Others like the exponents of the 'Meikanda Sastras'—Arulnandi Sivachariyar and Umapathi Sivam, read into it a testimony of the system of philosophy termed 'Saiva Siddhanta'. There are classical scholars like Dr. Pope who have studied this work for its biographical and historical interest. Sir P. Arunachalam and Professor K. Subramaniam Pillai have been attracted to it as a poem of mystic experiences, while Mahamahopadhyaya Kathiresan Chettiar and Brahmasri Navaneetha Krishna Bharati have been inspired by its literary merits. But as far as we are aware, none has so far delved into this great religious Poem to delight merely in its flowing numbers and bhakti 'rasas'.

The fundamental purpose of our quest has been to answer the question: 'Does Tiruvachakam fulfil our conception of Great and Pure Poetry?' — the touchstone of excellence of Poesy being that of the unified theory of Poetry advocated by Eastern and Western literary critics. By tracing the different ideas of Poetry in the different countries at different ages, we have sought to interpret Tiruvachakam which though it is a typical gem of South Indian Poetry, yet fulfils the canons of great and religious poetry of the East and West.

The approach to Tiruvachakam can only be made through the light shed by the author of Tiruvachakam; and we shall enter this holy *way* in lowly reverence. The path unfolds the designed and focussed shapeliness of the whole poem from 'Sivapuranam' to 'Acho Padigam'. We shall attempt to get an insight into the progressive realisation of the poet and follow the arrangement and order of the poet's compositions as they are found today, by interpreting it as the

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complexity of his experiences turned into a single flame of consciousness, asserting its radiance over all the principalities and powers of this world. "All great poetry represents", A. C. Bradley states in Poetry for Poetry's Sake, "something like the whole gamut of possible experience which will become in our minds a single infinitely rich chord of harmony". The crucial idea of the conversion of St. Manikkavachakar turning towards the light of God is conveyed in the event of his meeting the God-Guru under the Kuruntha tree at Tiruperunturai. This experience of 'His Grace' stirs in the poet an unquenchable thirst for 'His Love' — this is the epitome of Tiruvachakam.

Art is beauty refracted through the artist's mind to the world. St. Manikkavachakar's delight is his own private ecstasy. But his artistic expression in Tiruvachakam is for the uplift and rapture of humanity. In Tiruvachaka-Rajya, the world is realised and expressed as a unity and as a harmony, in and through the spontaneous expression of pure and essential human nature. In this manner we have tried to understand the poetic genius of Manivachakar as the "instantaneous harmony of the fullest emotional realisation", so ably defined by Lascelles Abercrombie in his Essay on the Idea of Great Poetry.

The bard's name Manikkavachakar — he whose utterances are rubies — is a testimony to the precious, lustrous and unique expression of his unique experience of "Self consciousness"! He said what he meant, but his meaning seems to beckon away beyond itself or rather to expand into something boundless, the glory of Eternity which is but dimly focussed in it, something which we feel would satisfy the whole of us. In this poem, there floats about an atmosphere of infinite suggestion; that something which makes us seem

> "To patch up fragments of a dream,
> Part of which comes true and part
> Beats and trembles in the heart".

Those who can read this poem in the original Tamil language can without much difficulty feel the echo of perfection and felicity of language, and experience the sobs and songs of the finite man, at first murmuring in sweet yet aching

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undertones, and then mingling with the rapturous ecstasy of joy and bliss infinite.

This Testament of Love so overpowered me that when I finished reading the poem for the first time, I found myself in speechless silence:

Prophetic Bard! Bharata Matha's Gem!
The pulses of my being beat anew
When I did taste thy honey sweet;
Even as life returns on the drowned,
My weary tongue sent forth a cry.
Keen sobs of Love and joy untold
Within my heart, they touched a vital chord.
From that seat of pain woke a hopeful cry.
Oh, Manikkavachaka!
I journeyed through thy goodly domain,
and listened to thy liquid notes divine,
More hypnotic than ariel's floating strain.
Dazed and speechless, I traced my trail
Soul and body rapt in expectant thrill,
To the magic call of eternal bliss.

Tiruvachakam is a song of praise and invocation to the ineffable light of the poet's Guru and Master, and is the result of a mighty love, infinitely more precious than that of a mother to her child or that of the beloved to her consort. One can only comprehend the nature of this Love's 'summum bonum' in the language of human relationships; and in the fifty-one cantos of Tiruvachakam, all the stages of Love's fulfilment are delineated with remarkable clarity and insight by the enlightened seer, in the richness of his experience. The author of Tiruvachakam, St. Manivachakar, proclaims in his immortal poem, to all those who have not participated in his pilgrimage of faith and illumination, that irresistible are the ties that bind man to God. Tiruvachakam probes deeper into the unfathomable depths of the Lord's compassionate grace interacting on man, than any other recorded psalm of mankind down the ages.

THE TREASURY OF GEMS DIVINE

Saint Manikkavachakar of Tiruvathavur is the author of the song of Divine utterance — Tiruvachakam. It is the

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ambrosia that exemplifies the highest way of life attainable by any human being; that which gives him supreme freedom of 'Being' and joy infinite. The title of the poem has been interpreted in various ways: "Divine Utterance", "Beauteous words", and "Holy strains" — a poem woven of divine cadence and words. "Tiru" signifies divine sanctity, a word of magnetic charm and connotes perfection. "Truth is Beauty and Beauty is Truth". It also connotes that which is magnetic and full of soulful grace — a poem of exaltation, sweetness, simplicity, wealth and joyful bliss, gems emitting rays of light. Tiru is equivalent to sublime, sacred, holy or glorious. It is a poem that deals with Eternity. To this class of poetry belong Dante's "Divine Comedy", "Tiruvaimoli" and "Tiru Arutpa". Tiruvachakam unfolds the noblest and sublimest expression of human love to God, a wonderful poetic exposition of the great truth enunciated by Tirumular that "Love is God". "Vachakam", betokens the supremacy of the spoken word. "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God".

'Tiru' says Kali Tandavarayar in his Introduction to the commentary on Tiruvachakam (1786 edition) connotes "Arul" or grace, and 'Vachakam' denotes its rhythm or expression. Manivachakar in the light of his consecration at the Feet of his God-Guru, in complete surrender of body, mind and heart, purged of all dross by the divine grace of the Lord appearing to him in the human form as his Guru or Master, saw, tasted, imbibed and became commingled in the ecstasy of the Lord's Bliss. He addresses in the first person the Lord and his mind alternately, till the dialogue of address merges into the symphony of dialogic monologue of beatific bliss of Siva. The value of this testament of love lies not only in the ecstatic joy that filled the heart of the author Manivachakar, when he sang this song but also in the dynamic power to evoke a similar response in the hearts of all those who can chant these sonatos with understanding. They too partake of the felicity of the bliss of Lord Siva, in the company of his votaries.

Tiruvachakam thus is an authoritative utterance in the accumulated treasury of spiritual truths revealed in the history of Hindu Faith. It is the charter of Hinduism wherein a

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Hindu can lie at anchor. It embodies the deepest experiences of a Jivan-Mukta (perfect Being.) The blooms of Realisation have been gathered together with the cord of Love and made into a beauteous bouquet of worship. It is the gospel of attainment to the universal 'Everyman'.

The poem consists of fifty-one lyrics including four 'Ahavals' — invocations or Garlands of Praise to the Lord, and forty-seven other cantos, some of which are odes, each containing ten stanzas known as Padigams. Each stanza in the Padigam forms a unit of its own, as well as a link in interpreting the meaning of the whole canto. Each canto in turn is a unit of experience, characterised by intensity and richness and knit into organic unity, evoking the emotional realisation of Santa.

The order of the poems in Tiruvachakam eludes analysis, on the basis of conception, structure or on the unity of time and place. The Odes sung at Tillai precede the lyrics composed at Tirupperunturai, while incidents relating to the earlier period of the poet's dedicated life, figure in the later sections of the poem. The criticism that Tiruvachakam as it stands, does not signify any purposeful arrangement, seems to be a grave injustice to the poet. After a careful study of the whole poem and in the light of comparative study with other great mystic poems of the world, the conclusion is irresistible that Manikkavachakar (he whose utterances are rubies) adopted a technique which conforms to the form of Great poetry, as interpreted by us.

It is true that while visiting holy shrines or when burdened with the sufferings, inevitable to a seeker of truth, the poet may have found an immediate impulse to sing; he may have thus expressed spontaneously his inspired realisations. This is the common method followed by almost all the poetic bards who wrote the Thevaram and the Prabantham lyrics. But Manikkavachakar did not stop there; he went a step higher. The perfect artist that he was, he wove the interrelated parts into a whole and gave it the unity of inspiration. In the quiet sanctuary at Tillai, he focussed the shapeliness of the whole poem, as "emotion recollected in tranquillity". Our approach to the study of Tiruvachakam is based

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on the conviction, that in its present order and arrangement, wherein he followed the rhythm of his emotional realisation, the poem was finally delivered by the poet at the feet of the Lord of Tillai.

There are two mighty forces at work in the poem, which must be understood clearly. The first moving force is the *direct* address of the Poet to the Lord in His Transcendent and Immanent State, in the Formless, in the manifestation of Father-Mother (Ammai-Appa), in the elusive nature of form and yet formless, in the revelation of the Gracious feet, and in the relationship of a very insignificant bondsman to the Almighty Master. In utter humility and overpowered by an irresistible love, the poet calls on the Supreme for the beatitude of bliss — "Thy slave am I". The second dynamo works on the address of this Jivan-Mukta (the Realised Being) to his brethren in the world calling upon them in his great zest to share with him the progression, the vicissitudes, the joys and the pitfalls of man the seeker, in his eternal search after the unknowable supreme Reality, who also manifests as the supreme lover who takes His abode in the heart of man.

Few feats of the human mind have equalled that of Manikkavachakar's expression of a complete faith and of transporting such a faith into art. His poetry, we find, blossomed before the sacred feet of the Lord of Tillai; and how can any critic say that this final presentation of Tiruvachakam lacks harmony? From the first poem of Sivapuranam to the last Ode on 'Acho padigam', there flows unbroken the rhythm of his spiritual experience. Listen to the opening music of Tiruvachakam on the word of God — "Nama-Sivaya". It echoes throughout the poem and carries with it the idea of a Supreme Mover of the world and the picture of the poet in bondage. Here begins the wondrous tale of the Pilgrim of Eternity who journeys from bondage to the freedom of Sivanagar, from the state of calling upon the Lord as "NamaSivaya", to the blissful stage of freedom in addressing Him as "Sivayanama". This 'Rasa' of fulfilment, this incantation evoked by a reading of the poem as a whole is the theme of an appreciative study of Tiruvachakam.

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CHAPTER V

THE SUPREMACY OF OM NAMASIVAYA

It is said that the essence of our being lies in the earth: the essence of the earth in water; the essence of water in the plants; the essence of plants in the man; the essence of man in speech; the essence of speech in the scriptures; and the essence of the Holy Scripture in the name Namasivaya — the sound symbol of Lord Siva. It is the word of wisdom to be meditated upon and is the symbol of all life. The whole of this universe exists in its manifested state with both name and form as its conditions. Form is the outer crust and the name is the inner essence. They both are one and the same truth eternal, knowledge divine, essence everlasting.

Namasivaya is the sacred name of Siva. It is a name without a synonym. Chanting this name, an aspirant can realise the divine reality. Namasivaya connotes the love and music of the divine and fills the whole cosmos animate and inanimate with its silent music. It fills time, space, causation, with its silent speech. Namasivaya is beyond all preaching and time; meditation on it results in superconscious experience. It cannot be taught from books but can only be caught by intuition from the experience of the Guru. Realisation cannot be intellectualised or reasoned upon but can be experienced, felt and lived. By repeating the name 'Namasivaya' the mystic word of God, Manikkavachakar has again and again emphasised that one can realise God — the underlying Reality, the supreme light of Eternal Truth.

Let us analyse the poetic unity of the first two lyrics in Tiruvachakam. "Sivapuranam" was supposed to have been sung by the poet after being enlightened by the God-Guru at Tirupperunturai, and it deals mainly with the transcendent nature of the Lord. Long afterwards, at Tillai, filled with profound gratitude, he sings on the manifestations of the Lord's Grace in the second lyric on "The Psalm of Sivan's Glory". The first poem Sivapuranam is the morning hymn

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of praise, breathing hope and love. The 'Ahaval on Sivan's Glory' is the evening hymn of praise infusing calm beauty.

In 'Sivapuranam', the sun of glory has just risen in the poet's mental orbit and in 'Sivan's Glory', the poet is nearer the goal of union with the sun of glory. Thus we see, the unity in the poet's emotional experience which leads him to hail the Lord, in His transcendent nature on his first initiation at Tirupperunturai, and this is fittingly followed by the mature glorification of the Lord in His immanence at Tillai; the praise of Siva's transcendental nature is followed by His glorious, gracious nature. Thus is built up the organic spiritual harmony which makes the poet's communication, a perfect work of art. That we may enjoy Tiruvachakam, we too must be emotionally responsive to this technique, through which the attitudes and feelings of the poet's experience are evoked.

In every canto in Tiruvachakam, we find moving references to the greatest and grandest experiences of the poet's life. "When the Lord made him, His very own"! This crucial incident gains a halo of poetic sanctity by the constant repetition in each section, for, by this fruit of Grace which the Lord gave him under the Kuruntha tree, was born the poem of sweetest utterance. He never forgets for a moment, his *first* meeting with the God-Guru, and his enlightenment stands revealed prominently. This is the source — this Mount of Grace — from which his stream of poesy rises and flows, steadily gathering force as it nears the ocean of Bliss. The essence, the unity of Tiruvachakam's poesy consists in the emotional realisation flowing from this height of the poet's vital experience — the conversion under the Kuruntha tree, and the poet's initiation into the holy word of God — Namasivaya.

WOVEN CADENCES

That Manikkavachakar was a cultured man who entered fully into the heritage of his land, is clear from his poems. Content, style, diction and mastery of metres all show the accomplished poet. He knew how to find poetry in local customs and homely stories. Over all his experiences, he threw the glamour of his poetic genius. By virtue of the

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enchantment of language, the poet's personal mastery of an infinite wealth has become our possession too. We shall now give a few examples to show how words have a soul as well as a sense in Tiruvachakam. Striking phrases stir the depths:

'My Lord who consumes the soul'.
'The ancient sea of felicity infinite'.
'My speech is dedicated to utter Thy Gem-like word'.

The sound of words is effective and in the last three stanzas of "Leave me not" Lyric, where the poet adopts the (mock-heroic) "Ninthastuthi" style of addressing the Lord, we have fine examples of the subtler expressiveness of the mere sound of words. The poetic imagery conveys the sentiments of the poet's indignation at the Lord's indifference to him. The surging chaos of the unexpressed suffuses and colours everything and images flash and struggle into existence. We shall now give a few examples of the witchery of imagery. Behold a stray cow without the sheltering care of the cow-herd! At a distance is the majestic sight of the Lord, the shepherd, and His favoured saints rambling in sportive glee in pastures green. When the symbol is understood, we realise the forlornness, nay, the pathetic helplessness of the straying poet on one side in sharp contrast to the happy picture of the saints of God. The original experience of the poet corresponds to our understanding of the simile and imagery.

The heron waits on the bank patiently and sadly, day and night for its prey and grows weary in its watch. So awaits the poet, day and night for the chance bequest of grace and his weariness and futility are only accentuated by the contrasting happiness of the holy ones of God who reach the shore of bliss on the other side. The Lord does not reveal Himself to him even as the ghee is not visibly manifest in the unchurned milk. Thus we read the poetry of emotional forces that crave for sensuous form for their expression, and in relation to each symbol, the pattern of deliverance is wrought out, the central experience of the poet communicated.

The realisation that the Lord is man's fulfilment is mediated through the imagery of a lady-love who pours her strains of love-lornness and the affliction of separation to her sweet

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mother. "Oh, mother, even if the great beloved comes before me, I will feel abashed to look upon Him for my power of sight fails". With something of the directness of intuition, we apprehend the intimations of early childhood, when the poet pleads with the Lord to come as his own mother and feed his unquenchable hunger with the milk of divine grace, lest he be orphaned and so perish. This image evokes the deeply felt memories of infancy, the wonder of the babe's first apprehension of love, joy and illumination as he is wrapped in the caresses of his loving mother.

In Manikkavachakar's poem, we are aware of the social pattern of lordship and sovereignty, helping to determine the image of God and of the right approach to His presence. But the range of his vision took him to other forms too, set in its utter simplicity at the point of the poem's growing ecstasy. In these several ways, the emotional significance of poetic images comes to inhere in the words used by the poet for the rhythms of his inner experiences. It is by the power of words, similes and images poetically used, to gather, hold and release again, infinite subtleties of emotional meaning, that the enjoyment of Tiruvachakam is effected.

The poet employs the radiant persuasions of sound and sense, 'sabda and artha' which are marshalled into harmony in order to produce in the reader's mind, the poet's joyous experience of union with his Beloved Lord. This bliss is Rasa wherein the skill of the poet consists in rousing just that kind of feeling similar to the complex of feeling he possessed. In Tiruvachakam, we find illustrations of all these forms of Bhakti rasa. To Manikkavachakar, the alambana vibhava is Siva:

> "My wealth art Thou, Lord Siva".
> "My Rapturous Bliss—I have seized Thee fast!"

We also see the plaintive strains of Karunai Rasa (compassion) in the line:

> "Though fettered in deeds, if I weep, will I not attain Thee?"

Along with pathos, go hand in hand its accessories of loneliness and frustration. The sense of separation from the Lord and gratitude for His boundless mercy fill the heart of the poet with melting love till at last ineffable bliss floods his soul.

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The rasa of surprise (Athisaya) and that of wonder (Atputha) find an indispensable place in the great poem. That peculiar enjoyment in which we are consciously aware of the element of surprise is 'Athisaya', and that super-abundant feeling in which we do not know what we experience or how we experience is termed 'Atputha'. In the Ode to Wonder, he describes the conscious experience of the bliss of enjoyment in the company of the saints of God. In the Miracle Ode is described the unutterable personal experience of partaking in the felicity of divine grace which cannot be analysed by the poet and so he says, "I comprehend not Thy wondrous miracle". Thus this element of wonder, known and unknown, aids the poet in the contemplation of the strangeness, greatness and the matchless nature of his spiritual transfiguration. In the Ode to Fear, we get the 'rasa' of fear. The poet illustrates the dread and fear he would suffer at the sight of all things "unholy". In the Tiruvunthiyar Ode, is expressed the rasa of heroism (Vira) and the poem celebrates the sacred victories of the Lord over the forces of evil.

Thus it becomes an exhilarating adventure to follow the art of the poet, who did not shrink from speaking of the grandeur of eternity with the tongue of fire, who sought to bring light and darkness in the same picture, who blended concord and discord, who scaled the Himalayan heights of exalted vision, from where he looked down into the deepest chasms of humanity filled with stench and smoke. It grips us to read alternately of his ecstatic joy in the "Ode to Tillai", soon after to be followed by the sinking into melancholy in the "Song of Supplication".

Thus in the texture of Manikkavachakar's poetry, we get the recurring factors of pain or tension of discord, as the feeling of separation from his object of love is on the crescendo, followed by relief and delight, as the feeling of union with his Lord predominates. This corresponds to the continual interplay of opposites, glimpses of infinite bliss amidst earthly frustration and pain, gloating in the rapture of bliss as testified in the Testament of Attainment, succeeded by the frozen chill of impatient waiting as seen in the "Garland of Joy", gazing at one time on the resplendent radiance of Siva, revelling in its illuminating joy and turning the next moment

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to view with anguish, the agonies of the world of man. It is by such subtle transforming power that the poet works out an ideal reconcilement of opposites; it is the insight of the poet into the nature of his experience as he journeyed from 'Asat' (the world of matter) to 'Sat' (God), that constitutes the integral element of Manikkavachakar's poetry. This is the "open sesame" to enjoy the 'rasa' of Tiruvachakam, radiating the unity of aesthetic emotion, realistic imagination, and truth of beauty.

"Was never voice of ours could say
Our inmost in the sweetest way;
Like yonder voice aloft and link
All hearers in the song they drink".

The Hyblaean murmurs of pure poetry vibrated within and without him, till they crystallised into a grand song of high and sublime love. This is Tiruvachakam, a linked lay of Truth set in a throne of Beauty, a testament of Love to Him who dwells with Tiru or Beauty. The Poet echoes this in the following lyric:

"Though bidden to see with the eye of Grace,
I strove with other eyes to see;
Darkness was all I saw, thick gloom,
Nor saw I the seeing one;
I neared the grace of God, its vastness,
Its stretches of unending Bliss —
Lo! my darkness afar was driven.
I saw His Beauty, only His".

Tiruvachakam is a Poem of Religious Experience with its distinctive revelations of the God-Guru to His chosen vassal. The crowning realisation of the bard of Vathavur is the irrefutable proof that "We are all divine children of immortal bliss, the faithful servants of the Lord who hath made us His own". At the close of our study of Tiruvachakam, the Testament of Love, we find ourselves in prayer, as did Coleridge in a different context:

"Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close,
I sat, my being blended in one thought.
Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?
Absorbed yet hanging still upon the sound —
And when I rose I found myself in prayer".

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SAINT MANIKKAVACHAKAR AS REVEALED IN TIRUVACHAKAM

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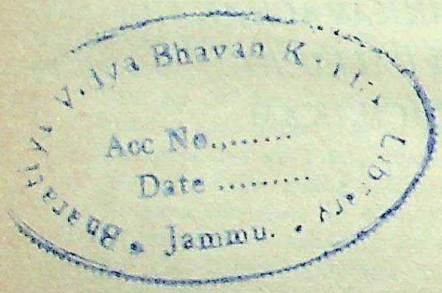

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CHAPTER VI

THE POET OF DIVINE UTTERANCE

Manikkavachakar was one of the greatest of Poets, Saints and Sages. It is very difficult to disentangle his history from the multitude of legends in which it is involved; but we have fifty-one poems ascribed to him, and believed to be genuine. From these, something of his character, history, and teaching may be gathered. When they are carefully studied, we see the real *man* and *poet of divine utterance*.

Few of the world's biographies are more interesting than that of this man of rare genius; who, in his early youth, when he was the chief minister of the great Pandya King, met with, and was converted by a guru, whom he then and always believed to be Siva himself; and became at once an utterly self-renouncing, ascetic Saiva mendicant; continuing instant in labours, patient in suffering, and constant in devotion, through the many years of his after-life.

The poet perceived, realised, lived and communicated to man, the supreme experience that Siva is the transcendent and immanent Reality, pervading the whole visible and invisible universe, and that his five-fold acts of creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment and gracious release are embodied in his ceaseless mystic dance at Tillai. In man's sleep and at all times his activity goes on. The heart-beat continues. Who regulates it, when all his other limbs are at rest? By the power of His immanence, He works through 'Sakti' or Grace, and moves into activity the listless limbs of man. In the hearts of all men, the Lord Siva has planted his lotus feet and energises man to create, preserve, destroy, embody and release. This is known as the mystic dance. As an external symbol of this internal dance of Siva in the secret recesses of the human heart, Tillai signifies the centre of the universe from where He performs His Cosmic Dance. He is thus the active force behind both the movement of the universe as well as of man, and this in essence is the message of St. Manikkavachakar.

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When Manikkavachakar had taken his abode at Chidambaram in the evening of his life, contemplating on the resplendent form of the Lord of Tillai, the source of Being, pure Intelligence and Bliss ineffable, the devotees there discovered his manuscript of Tiruvachakam on the threshold of the temple. They came in a body to the author of the poem and wanted him to explain the full import of his exquisite composition. Manikkavachakar took them to the sanctuary of the temple and pointed to the image of the Lord in the Holy of Holies and said that He was the Subject, nay the Essence of Tiruvachakam, and in the great awakening flame that arose from within, he mingled in oneness.

"True wisdom, gleaming bright in splendour true.
More subtile Thou than fragrance.
Thou art the Mystic Word, transcending word and thought".

According to the recorded biography of the poet, it is given that he was born at Tiruvathavur in the Pandyan kingdom of South India, and was called 'Vathavuran,' according to the custom of being named after the land of birth. He was also known as 'Tennavan Brahmarayan' which name connotes wide scholarship and culture, — "he who is master of 'Brahmam' (wisdom) in the South". The fame of his great learning and accomplishments so spread that he was appointed as the chief minister in the royal court at Madura, the capital city of the then powerful sovereign, Arimartana Pandya who held sway in South India.

It is an indisputable fact that Tennavan Brahmarayan was endowed with the rich qualities of the head and heart and was highly respected as the premier citizen in the premier land of the South, celebrated for its immense resources of wealth, learning, arts, and spirituality. His towering personality attracted not only the King and his courtiers, but also the scholars, warriors and those with rich merchandise, the tillers of the soil and the craftsmen — all of whom came under his vigilance and benevolence. He witnessed the magnificent glitter of life as a supreme minister of a powerful state and in the Garland of Praise, he recounts one by one the passing pageantry of the pomp and glory of vast learning, abundant power, irresistible pleasures of wine and women and the disdain of authority that passed before him.

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All these, however, failed to fascinate this youthful administrator who saw through all the fleeting vanities, the thralldom of man. He was searching within and without for the supreme objective of man's life on earth. He knew that it was not in this nor in that, but negative answers failed to satisfy him. No mortal physician could cure him of his malady. It was in this state of mind that he found himself commissioned by his royal master, Arimartana Pandya, to purchase horses of the finest breed from off the western port of Tiruperunturai, for the royal cavalry. The episode of the horses gives us an insight into the real nature of the man beneath the attire of royalty, his aspirations and hopes and reveals the dynamic personality of 'Tennavan Brahmarayan', undimmed by the meshes of myth and legend.

WHAT WENT YE OUT TO SEE?

The central incident of Manikkavachakar's life is his consecration to the service of God, while he was in the prime of youth and in the plenitude of temporal power. He set out on his royal mission with elaborate preparations and there on the way, he encountered the Master — Guru — who dispelled his doubts and fears and called him 'Manikkavachaka', "he whose utterances are gems", signifying thereby his service as a songster divine; so that the world groaning in travail may listen to his ageless gems on the eternal meeting of the human and the divine self, and the commingling of the love of man in the Love of God.

As the royal cavalcade with the youthful prime minister at the head draws near the town, the chant of the sacred Saiva Agamas rises in solemn mysterious strains from a neighbouring grove, and he reverently alights and approaches the spot whence the mystic music proceeds. From that instant his secular life is over. He beholds a mystic seer seated at the foot of a spreading "Kuruntha" (Alalantia Missionis) bedecked with rosaries of scarlet eleocarpus beads, smeared with holy ashes, and surrounded by an admiring and intently listening host of disciples.

"With pious saints around, the Great Lord on earth
appeared a Brahminic seer;

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'Mid saints made perfect, Siva dances in Tillai's city old.
Mystic! He comes, enters our homes, makes us his own,
our services claim.
Upon His mighty roseate feet, our heads on fragrance
shall repose.

—42. 582. *The Salutation Ode*

The all-powerful leader of the procession rapt in wonder approached the Sage, who with one word, subjugated him instantaneously. The Ode on Wonder, Ode on Grace, and Ode to Dejection have poignant allusions to the initiation and the transfiguration of Manikkavachakar. From that moment of consecration, he became "one in feeling, power and faculty with the Infinite Eternal".

"Thou can'st stir to fertility without the aid of embryo;
The entire heaven and earth and all therein
Thou doth sustain and destroy. My base self,
Deceitful, mean, beneath thy temple portals
Thou fill'st with frenzy; bade me join the band
Of thy great and loving saints! Even if the tree
They plant yieldeth poison, men destroy it not;
So be it with me, my owner, in thy vineyard.

Tiruchatakam 10. 96.

He exchanges his rich garments and kingly adornments for the lowly habiliments of the man of God, and espousing poverty takes on the incantation of His holy word. He wakes,

"From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find
himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life".

From henceforth Manikkavachakar's homage turned from his earthly ruler Arimartana Pandya to the King of Kings. "Those dedicated to the service of Siva see no differentiation. Action and passivity are the same to them. They see no variation and no Unity" (Sivajnana Siddhiar). The world doth not understand them.

"Transcendent Good! My Lord, Thy servant yearns for Thee.
In raptures meet, I utter forth my fevered soul's delights.

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Still wandering from town to town; while men cry out
'A madman distraught', and each one echoes
Discordant words at me. Oh, whence cometh not death?"

Tiruchatakam 1. 3.

For it is a fundamental doctrine of Hinduism that the present life is a probation, a period of preparation for the realisation of Truth and ultimate communion with the Supreme. Our karma (action), our suffering is a gracious appointment of the Lord for the liberation of the human soul.

"Put pain from out the world, what room were left
For thanks to God, for love to man?"

And the instrument of release from all embodiment is that wisdom which understands the Divine purpose and adapts itself to it. This was the content of his Guru's initiation. Enlightened thus, the young sage renounces for ever, not without a pang, his attachments to his near and dear ones on earth.

"Not mine, but thy will befits me well. Lest I strayed,
Thou mad'st me know thy firm hand o'er thy saints.
Moved was I to watch her quivering lips, her attire
so casual.
Love's forlorn looks — such fetters worked havoc on me".

Tiruchatakam 6. 57.

In the consciousness of Primal Love which fills infinitude wholly, he seeks his reward and repose in the God-head: in vacant and in pensive moods, he recalls his consecration by his Guru, at the shrine of Perunturai:

In Perunturai girt with sacred stately groves
'neath the Kuruntham's flow'ry shade,
I recall Thy glories all, and pondering yearningly
oft invoke Thee as my Lord, my Lord.
Peerless Sage! When I, Thy servant, call Thee
struggling amid the billowy sea,
In grace declare the holy path to reach Kailai,
the silver Peak and bid me come!

Ode on Grace — 29.10.

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In almost everyone of the hymns in Tiruvachakam, Manikkavachakar alludes to his servitude at the feet of his Guru and pours forth in humility, his grateful love for the immeasurable, redeeming love of Siva, who chose him as His bondsman.

"Thyself I saw — My eyes spelt delight.
Countless days and nights, without thought
On it alone, I ponder still". 33. 9.

"He stood on earth, His dart shot forth,
He linked Himself to my thought,
Great Perunturai's Lord".

The Holy Lyric: 47. 3.

"Thou unique One, Incomparable art Thou! Thou Light
shining within the core of my being; Thy bondsman am I.
On me who knew not the true goal, void of merit,
O Love unique! Thou hast choice grace bestowed".

The Lyric of Flaming Love. 37. 5.

With the mendicant's staff and the mendicant's bowl, he goes out into the dusty countryside singing in melodious strains, and bequeathing the nectar of sacred and devout poetry, wherein is immortalised the sovereign love for his Divine Master. The pilgrim-saint marches steadfastly in the light of His grace, despising all earthly allurements, and perfectly resigned to the will of Siva, till he sights the journey's end which is Chidambaram, known in religious literature as Tillai. There he puts an end to his wandering life and settles down to a life of sweet contemplation on the beatific vision of Sri Nataraj, who has also made his soul, His abode.

"I lay as one who tills a barren field and reaps no crop;—
'Twas then I gained the merit of penance done of old;
Before Siva's roseate lotus feet, I bent my worthless head —
I've come unto Him, my Lord who bides in Tillai's
home of Joy".

Hymn to Golden Tillai 40. 9.

A spirit of resignation to the Divine will is not inconsistent with a supplication for grace, love and release from the bondage of life. Indeed Manikkavachakar was a great believer in the efficacy of chanting His holy name, Sivayanama, the

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Word of Siva, who is 'all-abounding Love', the vast ambrosial Sea of grace.

EBB AND FLOW

The author of Tiruvachakam has made it clear that all his poems are but fragments of a grand confession, and that he had given out to the world nothing which he himself had not experienced. To study his works is to study the man himself, to trace the evolution, mental, moral and spiritual of one, whose life was often said to be greater than his Poetry. Tiruvachakam is the unique autobiography of a great soul who saw God face to face and attained spiritual perfection.

We have nothing like it in the literature of the world — a Poem of Poems built to immortalise the ways of a seeker of light who struggled through the experience of this lower world to that of a higher One. Swami Vedachalam says: "Unless a man can reach the summit of self-realisation attained by that great soul, he cannot hope to place himself in a standpoint different from his own, and view the extent as well as the profound depth of that great mind. For a true comprehension therefore, of the essential nature of sanctified souls, the history written of them by others cannot help us much, as the records of the poets themselves on the inner working of their hearts faithfully".

The hymns of Tiruvachakam are a record of the sage's spiritual struggles against the ways of the world. His early poems breathe of despair and despondency as he moves from place to place, crying for the vanished light of the Guru, in abiding trust and faith. The young Saint finds no relief in ceremonial acts or learned expositions and by the purifying process of detachment, selflessness and love, gradually derives strength and sustenance. After his consecration at the feet of his Master, Manikkavachakar detached himself from worldly duties. Ministerial power and fame, the last infirmity of great minds, receded into the background while he contemplated on the Word of God — 'Sivayanama'. His kith and kin, foes and friends hurled scorn at him and despised him for the midsummer madness. They reviled in ignorance. Even though he had held the exalted position as Prime Minister, yet in his new role, he considered himself

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as a depraved dog; he had wagged his tail in the company of the wayward at all fleeting delights, till his Guru chose to elevate him in the eternal chariot of Bliss.

Many commentators of Tiruvachakam have read into the section entitled the poetry of Experience, autobiographical glimpses of the poet's reaction to the wrath of the King of the Pandyans, who was vexed with his chief minister for neglect of duty, and who sought to punish him in many cruel ways. It was then, they argue, that he sang the saddest songs as "Ode to Dejection" "Supplication", Lyric of Refuge, cantos on 'Grace,' "The Bruised Heart" and "No Joy in Life". His agonising lamentations tug at our heart strings:

> "O Father glorious! when thy bondsman helpless calls,
> Bid Thou in Grace, my fears begone".
>
> *Ode on Grace*: 29. 6.

> "Though I complain, in thee my soul delights;
> To gain anew thy love is my one thought;
> Thou see'st my heart is faint, I have no joy in life;
> In compassion, Bid me come to Thee".
>
> *Ode on the Burthen of Life*: 28.3.

Tradition testifies that on the day appointed for the horses to arrive at the palace of the Pandya King, the horses came mysteriously and the wrath of the King was temporarily appeased, but the trials of the poet were not over. The horses which were transformed from jackals, fled to their natural state causing great consternation in the land. In "Sacred Sadness", he says, "The Jackals ail, thou mad'st great horses; thus didst show Thy grace". At this strange transformation, the king was bewildered and ordered that his deceitful minister should be tortured, till he made good the royal coffers which he had squandered. Suffering only set free the hidden springs of poetry in the stricken heart of Manivachakar and some of the exquisite gems are sung — "The Holy Word", "Ode to Fear", "Ode on The Refuge" and "Lyric on Lament". The king at last realises the folly of inflicting any more punishment on a man of God and sets him free. The poet finds himself at last liberated wholly from the shackles of earthly ties and bonds. He retraces his steps to Tirup-

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perunturai where he had met his Guru, and the memory of consecration comes back to him poignantly.

"Thou overpowered me with a single word;
Thou held'st erewhile. But now I pant not, nor melt
in joy with mind subdued.
I feel no love devout. Why didst thou make me thine?"

CHAPTER VII

THE PILGRIM PAR EXCELLENCE

At Perunturai, Manivachakar was directed to visit the sacred shrines and finally get to Tillai. The singing minstrel wandered from place to place singing in praise of Siva. At Tiruvuthira-Kosa-Mangai, he sang "Forsake me not". Here he felt depressed and lonely. After the initial excitement of the consecration and the act of renunciation of his worldly life had died down, he stands in doubt and wavering faith. He finds himself a lonely mendicant despised by the world and his laments have a ring of genuine pathos.

"I wandered weary with none to say 'Fear not'! like
lightning flash,
Behold, thou too hast forsaken me! Thou Truth beyond
compare,
Great Uttara Kosa Mangai's King! Incomparable One;
My mother art Thou, my father Thou, My soul's most
precious wealth".
Forsake me Not: 6. 16.

The Poet seeks a way out of his bodily existence, whereby he would never suffer from the anguish of separation from His Master, the Light of Truth.

"Oft in darkness oft in woe, I sought Thee.
Brief was my exalted bliss with Thee.
My Master, where art Thou hid?"

He comes to realise that by singing the name of the lord, he can strengthen his love. He pleads for the freedom of

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the spirit and wants to put an end to the endless process of "becoming". "Here like a fledgling, I would gladly leave this faulty frame; yet know I not Dweller in this sense-world, how I may put Thee on". He moves up to "Tiruvidai Maruthur" where he sings the ditty on Recollection:

"Have I indeed performed Tapas?
With His Name 'Sivayanama', was I initiated;
Like honey and rare ambrosia sweet,
He came of his accord and entered my soul.
He gave His grace to me, His bondsman
And thenceforth I loathed this burthen of existence".

38. 10.

In every temple of the Lord, the pilgrim halts in his march, and derives great sustaining power. At "Tiruvathavur", he sang "The Sacred Lament". In a despondent state, he climbs the mount of 'Tirukalukunram'. Here is vouchsafed the second direct experience of the Lord. He conveys the joy that was his at this nearness of the Lord in his lyric on 'The Eagle Mount'.

"In wilderment I strayed from Perunturai far,
Where tears were changed to joy and foulness purged;
By sinful deeds to ruin brought
Bereft of the refuge where thy bright feet once stood
I knew not which way to turn.
A prey to dire perplexity, I dwelt.
To save me from confusion sore, Thou cam'st
And showd'st Thyself upon the Eagle's Hill".

30. 3.

It is evident from a study of this lyric that the Lord manifested Himself this time as the infinite Grace, the Indweller, the Lotus Feet that takes His abiding place in the temple of the devotee's self. "Thyself and myself art enthroned in the sanctuary of my own heart; long have I sought Thee as my Guru who hath vanished from my sight but now I find Thee ever so close to me, within me". This is the essence of the vision at the Eagle Hill. Finally he reaches Tillai, the journey's end. In Tillai's "Home of Joy", he feels limitless, boundless joy as a weary yet mature seasoned sailor, who has reached the shore in a worn-out bark.

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"Bud on the bough, then blooming flower, next
unripe fruit, then fruit
Matured — My frame thus formed, He made me His own,
nor hence departs;
That my trusting thought may ever cling to Him,
as it clings now.
I've reached Him, my Lord of Tillai".

Hymn to Golden Tillai. 40. 6.

Nothing can be more inspiring than the transition from this 'spirit' of heaviness and dejection to the buoyancy of hope and the certitude of Divine grace which characterize the Tillai poems. "While tossed on the broad billows of anguish on the 'Sea of birth', there flowed the stream of His Grace and bathed me in its exhilarating waters till ultimately, I seized 'the raft of the Five Letters', which showed me 'a boundless fertile shore!" Among his Tillai lyrics are to be seen his most impassioned utterances. "I've Tillai seen, that holds the Gem which endless rapture yields". His eyes feast on the unspeakable vision, in tranquil joy.

"From birth itself, from sickness, from old age
and earthly ties,
I went — I saw the Primal One, Owner of the World,
Who dwells, adored by Vedic sages and hosts of
heavenly ones,
In sacred Hall of Tillai, girt with leafy groves".

Ode to Tillai 31. 6.

From now onwards the poet looked upon the lord of Tillai as his All-in-All who gave him unfailing love and bliss ineffable. The transformation of the poet's superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of *thinking, seeing. feeling* and *being* into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness, and an integrated inner and outer existence in communion with the effulgent wisdom and fount of Love of the Lord of Tillai, is made complete and perfect.

"Thou mad'st my Thought, Thy Thought!
My mouth speaks aloud Thy Gem-like word!
Thyself Thou gavest, to lonely helpless me,
Thou Only Light ineffable!".

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MANIVACHAKAR'S GOAL

Thus the final stage is reached in Manivachakar's journey of Life. The purity of the soul has paved the way to the vision of Reality in the Lord of Tillai. His soul is merged in supreme Understanding, Love, Wisdom and eternal Grace, as he beholds the true saints of God in exalted bliss. In every place, he sees nothing but the "Knower". As we read his hymns on Tillai, we feel the under-current of joy pulsating and moving on wingless music. From darkness to light, through the lone paths of suffering and desire, and finally to the triumph of realisation, he had fought the good fight, and in the company of the faithful, he is admitted.

"The King of all! He came, and made me too, His own.
Henceforth I am no one's vassal; none I fear.
We've reached the goal; with the band of his saints,
In sea of bliss, we evermore shall immerse".

Tiruchatakam 3. 30.

What a mighty victory! From a sense of futility, overpowered with the incumbent weight of futile existence, he had climbed to the mountain top of mystic unity and rapture.

"I know myself no more; nor day's nor night's recurrence;
He who transcends mind and speech,
With mystic madness has maddened me".

34. 3.

Once the union with the ineffable bliss of Siva was realised, St. Manikkavachakar was filled with a holy urge to communicate that realisation, that bliss to the world of humanity, here where men sit and hear each other groan, and change their conditions of life and effect a change of heart in them, so that they too may experience the undying joy in the union of the human Love with the divine Grace. In lyrics of matchless beauty and melodious floating quatrains, the Poet dwells on the blessedness of Siva's infinite bliss.

"The pure gem's wordless music then shall such
joy yield; shall it not be?
The light that hides within my soul shall rise
in effulgence; shall it not be?
That manifold phenomena may cease, the Lord
shall come; shall it not be?

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Experience unchanging, unknown before, shall
unfold so; shall it not be?"
The Testament of Attainment 49. 7

In the Pilgrim-Song and in the Testament of Attainment, he rouses our feeble hearts to respond to his call, and seek through the grace of Siva the Unitive Bliss, that all might live eternally in the full and conscious enjoyment of the Lord.

That was what Manikkavachakar strove for and attained, and in his songs, the mission of his life to his countrymen is enshrined. The hymns of Tiruvachakam are songs of man's faith and love in things eternal, of his beatific vision of Truth, of his spiritual struggle and spiritual triumph — themes that are of the highest significance to all mankind; and who, on reading them will fail to realise, how in every age and race are found the prophets of God, who keep the flame of life burning steadily that others might follow its lights?

St. Manikkavachakar can only be understood in the background of an India with long ages of development. Behind him lay the land of the Vedas and the Upanishads, enriched by the message of Buddha and the innumerable Saints who sang the religious experiences of the Hindus, with the truth of personal realisation; a land that pulsated with religious systems of faiths and creeds. Beyond him lay the Asokan realm, steeped in the poetry and music of Kalidasa and the Bhagavata, the Ganges and the mighty Himalayas and nearer him stretched the territories of the Chera, Chola and Pandya Kings, the waters of Cauveri, Vaikai, the towering temples of Madura, Tillai and Kanyakumari. In short lay India with her million years of religious expression in which she has unfolded the advent of a progressive universal harmony, and realised the unity of existence in the midst of diversity, and such other fundamental and essential truths held by all her people in common.

Manivachakar stands as the revealer, the interpreter to the millions of people of the highest purpose of human life. The truths he sings have been sung by many a poetic seer

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before and after him, and would have been true had he never expressed them. The difference would have lain in their difficulty of access, in their want of clarity, and lack of coherence and unity of a personal utterance. He had scaled to the peak of God-Realisation and he conveyed his experiences in the most simple and touching strains of poesy. He had seen face to face the Reality which the Vedas and Agamas had figuratively described. After his realisation, he composed these Gems of divine utterances on his God-Guru, and of man's relationships with Him, the world and fellow beings, so that all who read his psalms may experience the might of His Grace, and learn to see in all the operations of human life and in the universe, the divine leela, and so grasp in its comprehensiveness the supreme Reality, the power of love and service to all God's faithful who walk on earth. This was the man behind Tiruvachakam, the man who uttered the living words of Love in Grace, by Grace and for Grace. In other words, who sang the tuneful song on the Lotus feet of the Supreme mover of the Universe and the indweller in the heart of man — the Poet of lustrous divine utterances.

No work is held in higher estimation and veneration by the Tamils than Manikkavachakar's Sacred Song. There are few poems in the World's devotional literature that can compare with the Tiruvachakam in light and sweetness, in grace and earnestness, in lofty feeling and fervid piety, in passionate longing for spiritual peace and purity, and in the uplifting faith in divine grace in which the human soul, tossed about on the stormy billows of intellectual and moral puzzles, finds a safe haven of rest. His glowing faith and piety have for centuries continued to thrill with rapturous emotion the millions of the Tamil country, whose story of spiritual growth, of spiritual struggle and spiritual triumph, has been permanently influenced by him.

To the Hindus, Manikkavachakar has always been 'the Saint whose words are sweetest honey', capable of quenching the thirst of their yearning souls, and whose utterances are 'precious rubies', forming a treasure-house full of accents of sanctified symphony. The song of hope, love, and redeeming grace is a rich heritage to humanity in whatever langu-

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age it may be written; and it is our hope that the sincere personal devotion and the irresistible fervour of spirit that breathe through Manikkavachakar's lyrics, will not only help the present generation of young people in the East and West nurtured in scientific humanism, to appreciate and realize the vitality of a life of spirituality, a life of living faith and devotion in the ideals of Hinduism rediscovered, but also hold this Earth at the centre, in the Sputnik Era.

We recall the words of Ramalinga Swamigal when we close the study of the sage who sang this testament of Love:

> When I begin to chant thy melodious sweet poesy —
> Thou Manikkavachaka, voice of Eternity!
> It tastes like the distilled juice of the sugar cane,
> Mixed with honey and milk and the juice of fruits.
> Lo! It gets assimilated in the body and absorbed
> In my life stream in saturated sweetness.

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THE POETRY OF ADORATION

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CHAPTER VIII

SIVAPURANAM — IN PRAISE OF SIVA

INVOCATION

'Namasivaya' — Word of God eternal,
Gracious Feet so holy, all Hail!
Hail! holy Feet of Him
Who quits not my heart for a split second;
Master-Gem who in Kohali brought me under thy spell;
Thy holy Feet all hail!
Hail Holy Feet of Him
Who draws nigh in grace, as wisdom of the 'Agamas'.

5. *The One in many, and many in one art thou Oh Lord,*
Thy Holy Feet, all hail!
Thou who with sovereign sway, subdues my soul's unrest,

Hallowed be thy Feet.
Siva, who vanquishes delusive births,
Thy almighty Feet, long live!
Thou who recedes from those that love not,
May thy beauteous Feet for ever gleam.
Thou distilled joy of all who adore thee with folded arms,

Victory to thy kingly Feet.

10. *Thou who uplifts thy worshippers true,*
May thy Feet resplendent be!
Praise be to Thee Oh Lord, our Father,
Thy Feet for e'er protect us!
Praise be to the radiant, roseate Feet of Siva,
May He our solace be!
Praise be to Thee, inmost Love so sublime,
Thy Feet our repose be!
Praise be to Thee who chases illusive birth,
His Kingly Feet our refuge be!

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Praise be to the God of comely Perunturai,
May His Feet guard us!
Praise rock of Grace, which gives unending joy!
May He our succour be!

MY CONSECRATION

'Cos Siva, Indweller, in my inmost core abides.
Spurred by His grace, at His Feet I prostrate.
Kindled by soulful joy, the psalm of Siva I chant.

That my dubious deeds of former births may pass.
His midmost eye illumining,
He came down, He who transcends thought,
To turn His benign grace on me.
Thus consecrated, I stand before thy sacred Feet.
Thou who pervades heaven and earth,
Light eternal and manifested,
Thought absolute beyond measurement, Thy infinite glory

I know not to extol, beset as I'm with evil deeds.

THE CYCLE OF EXISTENCE

From a stone to the embryonic stage
Of grass, shrub, worm and tree,
Moving on to the world of reptile, bird and beast,
In stature growing up to be a man,
Devil, and a host of sprites,
Becoming mighty asuras, sages and devas,

Lo, in this progression from primordial matter
To the organic world of being,
Weary I've grown with endless chain of rebirths.

BEHOLD! MY PEERLESS GURU

Thy immutable gleaming Feet, truly
This day I saw, and gained release.
Abide in me as the energising music of 'Om'
That I may be saved.
Thou Enlightenment true! Immaculate One!
Dispenser of perfect justice, whom the Vedas

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Their Lord proclaimed, yet immeasurably
Beyond their reach, Oh inexplicable One!
From Thee emanates the elixir of warmth and coolness,
Thou breath of purity who fills me with Grace,
So that all things false and fleeting might flee.
Light of wisdom, irradiating
Luminous sparks of radiant Truth!
To me who gropes in ignorance,
Void of understanding, bliss art Thou Oh Lord!

And Goodness supreme, before whose splendour
My deluding ignorance wanes.

THE LORD'S IMPACT WITH WORLD AND MAN

Beyond created time and space art Thou,
Without beginning and end.
Yet Thou dost create the many worlds,
Preserve, destroy, procreate.
And through manifold births, Thou leadest me
By Thy grace to dedicated service.
Imperceptible as the fragrance,
Thou art afar and yet so near.

Oh inscrutable mystery,
Who eludes speech and thought.
Indissoluble as the sweet juice of cane and cream
Commingled in the fresh pure milk,
Thy distilled bliss permeates
In the hearts of thy beloved devotees.
Our mighty Lord! who cleaves asunder
The continuity of births.

ENLIGHTENMENT BY GRACE

Sustainer of the elemental colours five!
Thou had'st not revealed

Thy true self when celestials extolled Thee,
Yet as I lay forlorn embedded in the gloom
Of illusive ignorance all around.
Thou did'st entwine me

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With rare cords of good and ill deeds.
And did'st clothe with outer skin
So as to shield the foul within,
This hovel of my body
With its nine gateways exuding pollution.

Thus entangled by the malignant senses five,
Sore perplexed,
My fettered mind not yearning for thy love,
Infallible One!
Bereft of all soul-melting goodness was I,
When thou did'st
Seek me in grace and to earth did come
And showed thy glorious Feet.

To me so despised and despicable,
Omniscience art thou,
The essence of tender love
More beloved than a mother.

SALUTATION TO THEE

Purest light eternal!
Emanating sparks of beauty manifest.
Blessed Guru! Entrancing Bliss!
My indweller Siva!
Great redeemer who leadest me to the highest goal.

Thou who severs the mind's delusions
With thy gracious love,
Whose tenderness torrential,
Inundates my heart for ever!
Insatiable sweetness art thou,
Oh Lord Almighty!
Unseen light, concealed within
The hearts of those that seek thee not.
Life of my life, who stirs
My soul to melting love.

Who are neither pleasure nor pain,
And yet who displays both.
Beloved of my devotees, yet who art beyond!

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Immanent unity in diversity!
Resplendent light, potent darkness,
Unseen excellence!
Thou art the alpha and the omega,
Mediator thou, power unmanifest.
My incomparable father
Who dogged me and made me thine own.

Incomprehensively beyond
The realisation of all enlightened seers,
Thou eludeth their visionary perception,
Oh understanding most subtle!
Life and death with its attachments touch thee not.
Immaculate One, guardian of my soul!
Invincible effulgence serene!
Deluge of bliss irresistible,
Father mine, supreme Lord.

Luminous splendour of creation,
Unutterable Insight Thou!
In this world of change and decay,
Thou dost manifest diversely,
Thou unchanging Reality!
Peace, perfect peace, deep in my heart
Wells up thy manna sweet,
Fountain of joy, my peerless Guru thou!

MY SUPPLICATION

Endure I cannot, to dwell any longer
In this body capricious.
Oh my father, my saviour Siva!
Thus my voice I raise in prayer,
To purge me from falsehood dross.
Liberated thus, let me no more return
To be ensnared by ties of birth and deed.
Oh thou lord Almighty,
Who breaks asunder the bonds of this frail body.

UNTO THE LAST

Lord who dost dance
In the midst of dense darkness cosmic,

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90. *Mystic dancer at Tillai!*
Sovereign of the southern land of Pandi.
That thou should'st ease the bonds of birth,
They implore thee,
Whom words declare not;
Beneath thy sacred Feet,
They commune with thee
Who art the incantation of their song.
Blessed are they who in obeisance meek

95. *Realise the fulness of attainment,*
Beneath Siva's Feet.

CHAPTER IX

SIVAPURANAM AN INVOCATION TO LORD SIVA
PLACE TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE THE EVERLASTING INFINITUDE OF SIVA

'Sivapuranam' is the psalm of praise: it extols the infinitude of Lord Siva, for the manifestation of His beneficent Grace! So interpreted Sage Agastya, the esoteric meaning of the First Canto of Tiruvachakam.

THE OPENING SYMPHONY : INVOCATION

Sivapuranam opens with the mystic symbol of 'Nama-Sivaya' — "Almighty Lord Siva, Adoration to Thee." This utterance suggests that the purpose of human life is to attain the Feet of the Lord. He who realises the significance of 'Namasivaya', "Praise be to Thee, Siva!" — as the highest goal in life, ceases to be enamoured of his own significance, engrossed as he is with the magnitude of the Lord's everlasting infinity. Hence the incantation of the 'Word of God eternal', marks the first step in the phase of the spiritual pilgrimage of the Poet of 'precious utterance' — Saint Manikkavachakar. 'Namasivaya' is the mystic word of power, whereby he was initiated to address His Lord and Master in the "I and Thou" dialogic relationship.

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THE MYSTIC WORD

Sivapuranam, it is presumed, has been sung to immortalise the meeting of Manivachakar with the Master, the 'Para-param' who is Siva Himself. 'Siva' denotes bliss, infinite Love and the auspicious light of wisdom. Therefore it is fitting that this holy invocation to Lord Siva should open the symphony of Tiruvachakam.

'Thy five-letters, All Hail!'

Manivachakar seems to convey to his Guru the purport of his song thus: 'let thy Grace and Love abide in me, Oh Thou Lord, who manifesteth Thyself in thy fivefold activity in the Universe of inanimate and animate beings; and by invoking thy *name*, let me pray for emancipation and liberation from the bonds of "Samsara", birth and death'.

'Namasivaya' marks the transfiguration of the humanity of man. This propitious symbol, this sacred name that unfolds the content of the whole of Tiruvachakam, this Word that consolidates the five-fold revelations of the supreme Being, this definable form of the indefinable formless, and this oracle that draws man out of the gloom of ignorance, into the bloom of enlightenment — this is NAMASIVAYA.

THE AWAKENING

At the foot of the Kuruntha tree, on the way to Perunturai, he heard the word of 'Namasivaya', and in the twinkling of the eye, overpowered by the great awakening light of the divine Master, St. Manivachakar changed his allegiance from the earthly ruler of the Pandya Kingdom to the sovereign ruler of the Universe, seen and unseen. By repeating the 'Word of God' — 'Namasivaya' — he draws a veil over his life in the world as a premier minister of state, a cultured and respected member of the royal council who was entrusted with the task of purchasing the finest horses in the land for the royal cavalry of the Pandya King; he enters into the ancient heritage of the pilgrims of eternity, who having seen the light that ne'er was on sea or land, and having experienced the impact of the Love of God, direct their concentration to the enjoyment of His Presence, in humility and absolute submission to His will.

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To the question of proof of his spiritual conversion, Sivapuranam is the answer. The Poet alludes to the incident of the Guru coming down to him, making Himself known to him, filling his heart with Love, so that illuminated by His Grace, "I begin to magnify His Name, every moment of my life — that He may not leave me a second." This is the secret of the genesis of Sivapuranam — the song of Praise.

THE CONSECRATION

'Namasivaya' is the mystic invocation whereby man can appeal directly to the Infinite Reality, the One without beginning and end, to reveal Himself in forms and ways accessible, understandable and attainable by man. Manikkavachakar's consecration commences with the incantation of the Lord's *name*, and like him, there are many Hindu seers to whom the Lord revealed Himself, and initiated them into the mysteries of the holy NAME OF GOD.

In the religious hymns of the Tirumurai Saints, we get glimpses of their spiritual experiences and they too have sung the glory of the 'Five letters'. Sang St. Tirugnana Sambandar,

> "Melt ye in praise of this sacred word of God,
> It is the touchstone of Truth, in all the four Vedas,
> The Name of the Lord — Namasivaya".

The venerable Saint Appar in his canto on 'Namasivaya' recalls the potent spell of this word of God, to guide and guard him against all ills, and extols the name as the "unfailing, strengthening, sustaining support of man".

St. Sundaramurthy who looked upon the Lord as his intimate friend sang thus: "Even if I should perchance forget to invoke Thee by any other act, my speech-organ at any rate will continue to repeat the name 'Namasivaya' ceaselessly."

In the same convincing way, Manivachakar too sings in adoration of the Lord's Name 'Namasivaya', as it unfolds to him the full purport of his consecration, from where there is no return, no looking back and no regret. The unquenchable Love of God has made him His Own, His very Own.

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WHAT THEN IS MY RELATIONSHIP TO HIM?

What is the nature of the relationship of man the finite being, to God the Infinite? In other words, how can we know God? The answer to this question is given in the first five lines of Sivapuranam.

The first two lines depict the "I believe" creed and faith of the author of Tiruvachakam. He believes in the manifestation of the Almighty, Infinite Lord, as the primeval sound and as the all-pervading Reality, whose gracious Feet can be beheld by mortals like him, who have been vouchsafed His Grace, and who have been brought into the orbit of the supreme Guru. "He takes His eternal abode in the temple of my heart, and that he may not quit my heart even for a split second, I sing in praise of His Holy Feet".

When man turns away from the world towards God, he reaches a stage where God's 'Sakti' or Wisdom contacts his soul. In such a stage of spiritual development, God is said to lift up the soul to His level of wisdom and then the soul is able to realise the Lord. This lifting up by God is, in ordinary terminology, said to be the advent of God as Guru to the Soul, giving it spiritual enlightenment. Man blessed with the infinite intelligence is emancipated from his bonds, and is initiated to the Lord's *name* of 'Namasivaya'. He proceeds steadfastly to enter into the everlasting infinitude of the Lord.

When the submission to His Will leads man progressively to the perennial enjoyment of the Lord's ineffable bliss, his worship of the Lord as 'Namasivaya', which invocation denotes that the soul of man is yet in bondage, changes to the incantation of the Lord as "Sivayanama", the mystic mantra of the fully emancipated soul. This then is the underlying relationship of a Jivan-Mukta to His Lord. This progressive spiritual experience of the poet calling upon his Lord in the early stages of his initiation as 'Namasivaya' and with the ripening of his love addressing Him as 'Sivayanama', forms the central theme of Tiruvachakam. When he was still attached to the allurements of the World, he woke up to the potent spell of 'Namasivaya', and gradually as he shed

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the veils of ignorance with the attainment of wisdom, he experienced the Lord as 'Sivayanama'.

WHAT ARE THE STAGES?

St. Manikkavachakar listens intently to his Guru's call; having heard the word of God directly, he contemplates on the sacred 'upadesam' (initiation), till it fixes him firmly in truth. The concentration on God's Grace symbolised in the first line of Sivapuranam, awakens in him the perception of Infinite wisdom, and thenceforth he attains a capacity to look at the soul, the World and its instruments of activity, and God in the true perspective. Once he realises his dependence upon God and His infinite Providence, he takes refuge under the Feet of the Almighty Guru, in order to escape from the miseries of the world.

HAIL, HOLY FEET OF GOD!

When man comes into contact with the supreme Wisdom of God and becomes gradually immersed in the light of God's Love and Grace, he is said to have 'attained the Feet of God'. This is the reason why in Sivapuranam, the Poet revels in saluting the 'Feet of the Lord'. The Lord abides in the hearts of true saints and saves them from sinking in the still sad music of humanity. The poet uses melodious terms to describe the Feet of the Lord, by which expressions are revealed the Lord's manifold relationships with man, and the diverse ways by which the Grace of the Lord can blossom in the heart of man.

The feet of God therefore represent the overruling wisdom, Love and Activity of the Lord, to which the soul submits its knowledge and action. Such submission is alluded to, as taking shelter under the gracious Feet of God, In this state of submission and surrender, the soul remains safe, happy and full of Love. In order that the soul may be steady in this supreme dedication, the contemplation of the meaning of 'Panchakshara' the Five-letters — the Name of the Lord — becomes essential. It is by absolute submission unto His Feet, that St. Manivachakar proclaims to the world, that the God-Guru came into his life and that as a result, he experienced such unalloyed happiness that he commiserates to

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all others who are yet novices in the spiritual upliftment, that the highest goal of man is to extol the praise of the Lord in thought, word and deed.

How then does man realise his life-purpose? What is it that makes him turn away from the world of evanescent pleasures and sorrows? Which is the Force that can break asunder the bonds that subdue men in serfdom? Who turns the activity of the soul — the effect of the good and ill deeds moving under the inevitable law of cause and effect which for ever generates new pitfalls and limitations, exercised by the substratum of matter (Maya), and which cannot help the soul to rise above its level of activity — away from the world towards God? It is the GRACE OF THE LORD. This in short is the quintessence of Sivapuranam, the opening Ode of Tiruvachakam.

HOW DOES THE LORD OPERATE HIS GRACE ON MAN?

The primordial matter is 'asat' and cannot act as it is constantly subject to changes through the effect of its causal deeds. The Soul cannot act as it does not possess the wisdom intrinsically and the law of cause and effect cannot act without the instrumental agent, and so it is that the Lord alone being untouched by any of these, can operate his five-fold acts of Creation, Preservation, Destruction, Involution and Vouchsafing of Grace, both on the macrocosm of the world and the microcosm of man. The sleep at night is the lull given to man after his toils of the day; Death is a higher lull given it after the wearisome tasks of life. There is yet another lull given to all souls in common at the end of the aeon, when the whole Universe reverts to its primordial condition. This is called 'Involution' and from this lull, the soul of man is awakened by the Grace of God, that can free man from the bonds of the 'three-fold malas' and enable him to attain the enlightened state from whence he can sing the song of Siva's Infinitude.

If only man takes refuge under the 'Feet' of God, 'He shall abide in his inner self for ever'. This truth is again and again reiterated in this canto of Sivapuranam. The boundless mercy of God has been the subject of many a song by the Saints of India, who supplicate for the experience of Joy

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divine (Nittai-Kudal). St. Sundarar sang that he could not endure any separation from the Lord. In many a melting psalm, St. Appar speaks of the Union which knows no parting and in which state, "there will be no grief but bliss eternal".

WHO IS THE LORD OF PERUNTURAI WHO REVEALED HIMSELF TO ME?

Manivachakar speaks of the Lord as his peerless Guru. His Master filled his heart with Grace: hitherto his egoism had led him to perform selfish actions which veiled the sun of Truth. His body-mind-ego were irrevocably subjugated to the sway of the material instruments and processes of the world. "Then came the Master within my reach and purged me of my ignorance and I entered into the experience of Light, Love and Wisdom. He made me 'His very Own.' Hail to His Victorious Feet!"

He is the unity in diversity and diversity rests in unity. He can assume a thousand forms and countless names — all diversified countenance of the supreme love of God, so that man can approach Him without fear, in all places and at all times, in work and play, without and within, and learn to understand the peace, perfect peace, the fruition of knowledge and love, beneath His sacred Feet. "May He our succour Be!" Sang Manikkavachakar thus in Sivapuranam:

"Thou art Sound, Energy, the Creator, the Preserver, the light of Intelligence, illuminating my soul which has been embedded in the continuity of births and deaths! Thou art eternal Truth and Love, revealed likewise in the hoary books of Wisdom and Agamas! Thou taketh thy abode in the sacred temples, as well as in the temples of the hearts of men, thy true devotees. Thou art the mystery of Life, inscrutable to the Devas, but the constant companion of thy chosen ones!"

"Thou art my Physician, who by His healing nectar of Grace turned me away from the discordant bewilderment of life! Thou art the King of Kings, who commandeered my services! Thou, my Liberator who freed me from the endless pangs of 'comings and goings' of human existence; what Bliss was mine when at thy feet, I dedicated my all! Lumin-

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ous Love who captivated my entire being — ever so close and yet so far! Praise be to Thee, Lord, my compassionate Father"!

(L. 35-45)

ARISE, AWAKE MY SOUL AND BEHOLD!

In soul-stirring lines, St. Manikkavachakar sings in praise of the Lord —He who eludes the keenest insight of the wise, but who reveals Himself to the poor in spirit. We behold the saintly poet faltering in his magnificent psalm of Praise, when he begins to dwell on his enlightening impact with his 'Beloved Master'. 'He came down and revealed His triple eye of Wisdom'.

"He who transcends thought, He showed His beauteous Feet." His ruby-utterance silenced, Manivachakar stands mute and rapt in the perfect Love of God, that passeth human understanding. "My effulgent Beloved cannot be extolled in words that are of the earth—earthy, My abject self knows not how to extol thy glorious Splendour". Finite man can never fully comprehend the Infinite Omnipotence! Having beheld the unspeakable glory of God, he turns his gaze at his own insignificant self. Here is his analysis.

WHO AM I?

"Through countless cycles of birth, moving through the gamut of lowly beginnings, my soul has groped its way persistently upward, grappling amidst confusing elements of matter and struggling under the fearful turmoil of ignorance. Caged as I was in a body defiled by impure pollution, I was in a pitiable state of thraldom, identifying myself with the consequences of my deeds, my ego and the deluding entanglements of the world. While embedded so inextricably in the finite plane of living, the infinite wisdom of God, unseen and immanent, the over-ruling Providence who controls the five-fold processes of the universe, energised my soul to activity through every stage of weary existence."

"I was an insignificant being, worth nothing, attaching myself from birth to birth to the grass, worm, tree, to bird, beast, demon, man, asura, sage, and deva. Embedded fearfully in ignorance and falsehood, ensnared by deluding values

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that intensified my suffering and travail, I played on the sands of Time, a puppet under the sway of the deceptive senses. Life's 'partings and meetings', its change and decay within and without confused me, till I grew weary and oppressed. It was then that He endowed me with unquenchable yearning for 'Release' from the myriad perils of human existence, and enlightened me from the stupor of darkness. My God-Guru, peerless Gem of lustrous light, impregnated me with divine Love and cut asunder all earthly ties and made me 'His own, His very own!' and led me to the Rock of Grace, from whence, I contacted directly, the Sun of my Soul!"

"IN TRUTH, THY GLEAMING FEET I SAW AND ATTAINED RELEASE"

St. Manikkavachakar reiterates the eternal truth that the soul of man can know God, not by the aid of the mind or senses or any of the "Mayic" instruments, but only if its vision can be connected therewith. The grace of God pursues man relentlessly till the soul of man yields in submission at His Feet. Then man beholds everything around him as the manifestation of Siva — 'Sivarupam', and the world appears as the realm of Siva permeated with the light that ne'er was on sea or land, but drawing its illumination from the radiance of God. Purified in thought, word and deed, the senses subdued in the service of the infinite Love, Manivachakar finds himself immersed in the ocean of bliss.

At this stage there dawns on the Poet the realisation that the Lord abides in his heart and he is filled with a deluge of Bliss ineffable, and secondly, the absolute necessity to be freed from the prison-house of body-mind existence, and the coils of mortality. Hence his intense yearning and supplication for *release* from all the bonds that fetter him and obstruct him from enjoying the blissful experience 'neath His sacred Feet. In his supplication to the Lord and Master to abide in him and he in Him, Manivachakar is consistent in all the poems in Tiruvachakam.

He describes his encounter with the Guru in melting strains of Love, and his submission, nay, consecration at His Feet is celebrated by his heart-felt offering of praise at every turn

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and in every phase. He renews his pledges of absolute surrender, by rediscovering fresh avenues of worshipful prayer to instil His Love in the core of his heart and to "make him His very own".

> "Oh Lord of Love! Cure me of my subtle ways,
> Oh Lord of Compassion! Flood my heart with thy tender mercy".

His adoration speeds on wingless melody of joy as he sings the paean of praise in his exalted moment of illumination. He extols the Lord's transcendental and immanent manifestations as he faces his Guru and Master and experiences infinite Bliss! No more bondage! No more suffering! No more fear, fatigue and frets of life! No more defeat by death and disease! Oh, for the freedom of Thy Bliss!

THE TESTIMONY OF THE BLESSED

Manikkavachakar's communion with the Lord of Perunturai and the experience of his whole-hearted surrender to the Divine Will, resulting in an ecstasy of 'Ananda', has been to some extent shared by the Tirumurai saints and the mystic seers of all ages and climes. St. Gnanasambandar drank the milk of divine wisdom and saw the Lord of Sikali as the loving Father and Mother in One, "He who captivated his soul".

St. Appar describes his soul's inseparable relationship with the Lord in the canto on Tiruvanaika. The Lord is addressed as the precious life blood, the life of life, penetrating to the inmost depths of intuition: "Having attained the refuge of thy golden Feet, what more dost Thou want of me?"

These peerless seers communicate their experiences of infinity in a language understandable by us, who languish still in the quagmire of the world. Their testament strikes a chord of yearning within us and awakens in us also the need to repeat the same supplication for liberation and realisation of the Lord. Such is the efficacy of their communication. The incantation of Sivapuranam by us can redeem us from the feverish groans and frets of this earth -- and recall the experience of the incommunicable joy that was St. Manivachakar's, when he sang His Praise in the immediate Pre-

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sence of the Lord, who came to him as his profound human Teacher, Preceptor, Friend, Philosopher and Guide. There was nothing hidden from his vision and as the mysteries of the Lord, world and his soul, unfolded themselves with crystal clear translucence, he bursts into a magnum paean of soulful adoration.

In the sure grasp of vision, he extols the Lord alternately as the transcendental Reality of Reality, effulgent Wisdom, Holiness enduring, Purity sublime, Goodness immaculate, Love most precious, Beauty divine, Truth illuminating and Bliss ineffable; Inscrutable mystery, who is ever so accessible to the lowliest of the low, inconceivable by the most penetrating intellect or intuition of man, and yet energising into activity the existence of every living being as Life of his Life, the breath of his being, the ultimate goal and meaning of life, Master, Friend, Sovereign Ruler, Father, Mother, beloved Companion, and Servant who mingles so intimately with his devotees true.

> "To the Lord Almighty, the all radiant splendour, the benign Providence who grants to man His Grace in order that he may attain the shelter of His Feet, and experience the Bliss immortal,
>
> To His beauteous, illuminating, sustaining, gracious Feet, All Hail!
>
> To the Lord of Tillai, Adoration!
>
> To the subject and object of the Incantation of Sivapuranam, obeisance to His Feet!"

So begins and ends the psalm of praise to Siva, in language of distilled sweetness and sung in mellifluous strains of Love by the Saint of Tiruvathavur. He had beheld the beatific vision and having so richly experienced the bliss infinite, sought out of compassion for humanity, to share his joy celestial with those who yet awaited the coming of His Grace.

> "Sing Ye all this psalm of Praise and gain the Freedom of Sivapuram!

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'Neath His Holy Feet, surrounded by His Holy band of devotees,
Invoke His Blessed NAME — OM NAMASIVAYA".

CHAPTER X

KEERTHI TIRU AHAVAL THE PSALM OF GLORY
PLACE TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE IN PRAISE OF SIVA'S GRACE

Lord Siva's manifold acts of glorious grace as recounted in the sacred lore of the Saivite Hindus are woven poetically in this garland of homage. He who is the supreme being has assumed many a habitation and a name, in order to manifest His gracious love to His devotees, who yearn for His light of grace.

THE PURPOSE

The Lord manifests Himself to his faithful devotees under varying circumstances, in varied places and grants them the succour they sorely need and pray for. The Almighty Lord reveals Himself to them in their diverse walks of life, and moves with them in consonance with their varied stages of spiritual development, so that His faithful ones may be drawn towards His light. From out of the abundance of His immeasurable love, He metes out to each one of his myriad votaries in accordance with his own intrinsic nature and abilities.

"To each and every one, His own nature imparting
Our Lord stands alone, Supreme, full of grace". (1.95-96)

SWEET REMEMBRANCE

The beauty of this psalm lies in the rich associations which each episode taken from the pages of the Sacred Books evokes in the hearts of all true lovers of Lord Siva. This magnificent tale of the compassionate acts (divine Leela) of the Lord unravels itself on the three dimensions of time, space and causation of not only this *world* at large, but also in the goodly realm of the *hearts* of all seekers of the Lord of Tiilai and particularly in the life of St. Manikkavachakar.

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The Poet like a full-blown lotus seems to float restfully on the sea of knowledge as he recounts the myriad renowned acts of the Lord of Tillai to save man from his thraldom. It is a fascinating picture of a "Siva-Gnani" who having experienced the benign rays of grace from the sun of life, the Lord of Tillai, calls on all passers-by to halt and listen to his sweet strains on Siva's gracious acts to man and himself.

TURN YE TO TILLAI

In Sivapuranam, the poet had alluded to the inability and helplessness of man to turn to the Lord by his own efforts. In Keerthi Tiru Ahaval, St. Manikkavachakar reiterates his faith in the abiding principle of God's Grace acting upon man and leading him step by step to his Holy Feet.

"He whose Holy Feet danced in the hoary city of Tillai,
He abideth in the hearts of countless souls, performing
The mystic dance of life.
He stands revealed in the beauty
Of His myriad qualities;
On terrestrial and celestial spheres,
He unfolds or hides the lore of Knowledge.
He has completely overcome my own ignorance.
That Love intense may flow from their hearts,
He bides within the core of his loved ones."

(1.1-8)

This psalm was sung in the sacred city of Tillai because in the opening line, the Poet refers to the antiquity of Tillai as the focus of the universe from where the Lord performed his cosmic dance, "trampling dense darkness down". The energising activity of the Lord performing His fivefold operations of destruction, preservation, creation, embodiment and gracious release on the universe is symbolised in the eternal mystic dance of life.

The Lord's activity finds its ripples deep within the heart of man too. He reveals His wondrous grace and energises man, by performing his "mystic dance" in the temple of his heart, and thereby enlightens all his true devotees, even as He did unto St. Manivachakar. They, in turn, with soul-melting love yearn for His Grace, the solace of His sacred

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Feet, so that they may be saved from the bonds of ignorance and pangs of suffering. The Lord responds to the supplication of His Beloved ones, by taking His cherished abode in the holy temple of their hearts.

Thereafter in the poem, there follows a series of particular incidents gleaned from the religious history of Saiva literature, to illustrate the compassionate acts of Lord Siva to his several devotees. This section is full of rich associations from puranic episodes and Hindu mythology. The Lord manifests Himself in diverse forms and shapes, to suit the context of the crying needs of man, in the everchanging vicissitudes and patterns of his existence on earth!

"The infinite Lord of Grace took unto His own
The nature of each and every one."

LIST TO HIS RENOWNED ACTS OF GRACE!

In this section of the psalm, the Lord's intimate relationships with his 'bhaktas' or devotees are delineated with rich imagery and reminiscential sentiment. At Mahendra, the Mount of mystic Lore, the agamas (Sacred Scriptures) saw the light of day; at Kalladam was the Lord beheld as 'Ammai-Appa' (mother-father) showering His bounteous grace on those who humbly sought Him there; In Uttara Kosai-Mangai, in Madurai, Perunturai, Vathavur and Iyaru, He revealed His benign grace and dwelt in those ancient shrines, with His consort — the divine Sakti; as a hunter, a fisherman, labourer and preceptor, He bestowed His infinite grace on His loved disciples and never wearied in revealing His 'Darsan' or Vision to them as the music of the anklet, as wisdom and illumination, as the Guru (Acharya) and left behind a trail of miracles for people to ponder and wonder at the divine Magician who could effect such transformation in their lives.

In multi-diverse forms, with multi-diverse nature
A myriad such mutations He became.
His inseparable spouse and He doth manifest so
That the world might be sustained.

(1.23-26)

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In this way the Poet gleaned from the pages of the scriptures, an impressive array of events depicting the Lord's unfailing Love. Then he moves to the crescendo of his own great transfiguration!

"And now to relate the way He made me His". The popular convention of royalty in India connotes special Insignia. Having been a minister of state in one of the advanced states of South India, the Poet employs kingly convention to convey the meeting of His Guru — the King of Kings. How did the God-Guru manifest Himself to St. Manivachakar?

THE ROYAL PAGEANTRY

The omniscient Lord came to him as King of Kings, invested with the ten insignia of regal power and splendour, in order to make him 'His very own'. He had the *banner of the Holy Ash* and his countenance shone in radiant joy as if fed perennially from the source of the *River of Bliss*, whose swift currents swept away all ills of humanity. This peerless Ruler full of grace and with the creative force of "Sakti" on his right side, came resounding the great *drum of Primeval Sound* and bearing the mystic spear, so that all his vileness and darkness vanished out of sight.

The beloved came unto him in mien so immaculate and resplendent and wearing the beauteous *blue Lotus Garland* that His loveliness entranced his heart. He who could not be fathomed by Brahma or Hari, came riding on a *horse* and showed him the righteous path, from where there was no return. He hailed from His ancient dominion of *Pandi Land* in which was situated the *city of Uttara Kosai Mangai* from where many a seer had sought His benign wisdom. *Deva-Deva* or Lord God Almighty was His name. Behold from His *Rock of Grace* there floated the gentle zephyr of bliss ineffable, which alone could assuage the grievous heart of man and dispel his darkness! Such was His graciousness.

> "He works upon each man's nature and prowess
> With his own peculiar stamp of individuality".
>
> (L-125-126)

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ITS PROFUNDITY

The poet's first meeting of the Lord is portrayed with lucidity. In this autobiographical passage, the experience of the God-Guru's relationship is brought out with a halo of sanctity. Hitherto he owed his allegiance to the King of Madura but from thence forward, he moves to the spell of the "Deva-Deva", the sovereign Lord whose dominion transcendeth heaven and earth.

COME UNTO TILLAI'S SACRED SHRINE

The Poet next proceeds in the psalm to describe the significance of the Guru's impact on him. What followed his encounter with the Lord?

> "The Guru bade me bide my time and come
> To Tillai's goodly shrine where He,
> His mystic dance performs."
>
> (1.127-128)

The poet also alludes disparagingly to himself as the despised cur, who could not join the happy band of the realised saints who followed the God-Guru in the Great Flame. "Thus He dealt with me and abandoned me on earth, whilst a few of his blessed devotees, purest companions of His Love accompanied Him and merged in ineffable communion in His luminous Oneness".

Then follows the description of the forlorn band of devotees, who like the Poet were left behind on earth. Some of them, overcome by the pangs of separation leaped into the fire from whence they had last beheld the vision of their God-Guru. Others in bewildered distress rolled and wailed and plunged into the lake with shouts of "Lord, Lord".

Yet others who remembered His Grace to Patanjali of old, yearned for the glimpse of His mystic Dance at Tillai — In all these diverse ways, they struggled and pressed forward to attain His blessed Feet.

It is lines like these scattered in the poem of Tiruvachakam, that make us long as the saintly poet Vathavurar did for the direct presence of the Lord and to be attracted to this great lover who conversed with his Eternal Beloved.

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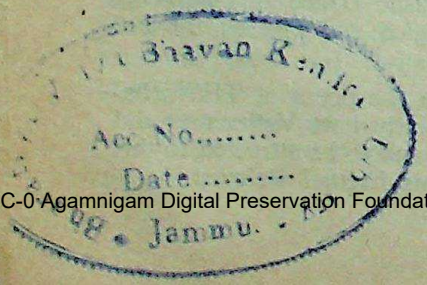
THE HAVEN

This Psalm closes on an eulogy on the sanctuary of Tillai, where with beauteous smile, the transcendent Lord of Mount Kailas takes up His abode in immanent form and performs His mystic dance, energising the world and the soul of man by His mighty Grace. "The elusive smile playing on the beauteous gracious countenance", is a beautiful sculptural image of Tillai transformed into a poetic image. Poets never tire of dwelling on the celestial smile of beauteous grace which lights up the face of Lord Siva, as He reveals His mystic dance to "Uma and Kali" who are but forces of His activity. This has been immortalised in the image of Sri Natarajah at Tillai which is the symbol of the Lord's immanent aspect in the universe, working in and through the "Arul sakti" or Grace, and with His veiling energy during the period of involution of the universe. The Dance of Siva explains the puzzle of continuous birth, progress and dissolution — that progress and light in one realm translates itself into disintegration and darkness in the other.

In this psalm of Keerthi Tiru Ahaval, St. Manivachakar delineates that the supreme Reality moves the universe objectively and the heart of man subjectively. By the fusion of associative links, by allusions to the religious traditions of the Hindus, with special reference to the Kingdom of Pandi, the poet interprets the manifestation of the Lord as Siva-Sakti, symbol of the operative force of Grace, and crowns it by portraying his own personal experience of meeting the Lord. He closes the song by a glorification of the sacred abode of Tillai, where His cosmic dance unfolds His Grace. That outstretched arm of the Lord of Tillai symbolises the hand that holds the power and showers Grace. That His showers of grace may fall on the UNIVERSE, is the burthen of the next song.



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CHAPTER XI

TIRUVANDA PAHUTHI — THE RHAPSODY ON SIVA
PLACE — TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE — SIVA'S MANIFESTATIONS

In the previous psalm, St. Manikkavachakar has been exhorted by his Guru to sojourn to Tillai. In this poem, he extols the revealed and the subtle relationship of the Lord in his interplay with the universe. The Supreme Being does not only take His abode at special sacred places like Mt. Kailas or Tillai; His presence embraces every part of this visible and invisible universe. He pervades the tiniest speck and atom and fills everything big and small — He whose omnipresence, none, not even the Gods of Creation and Preservation can ever comprehend fully.

The planetary spheres that constitute the elemental universe,
With their immeasurable nature and majestic phenomena,
Vying with one another in delicate distinctions of harmony,
And enhanced by infinite variety, past reckoning —
They're like floating atoms penetrated by rays through
narrow slits;
So microscopic they seem when pitted against His Infinity.

Know Him, who moves the realms of Brahma and Tirumal
In their work of creation and preservation; who effects
Their dissolution — Himself, the abiding source of Involution;
By His seen and unseen manifestations, as a mighty whirlwind
Overpowers the low pressure wind belts, He moves the world
In its dynamic processes — The Beauteous One.

According to the philosophy underlying the opening twelve lines of this psalm, the Supreme Being's interplay with the elemental universe is depicted. In the beginning of each aeon, the Lord evolves the phenomenal universe and sustains it as the scene of the activity of births and deaths of countless beings. At the end of each aeon, He destroys and

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involves the whole universe into its primal elements and finally in GRACE, He pervades within and without. The poet alludes to the fact that our limited vision sees this vast universe of the sun, moon and planets as something stupendous. But in truth it is infinitesimal in the perspective of the Lord's infinity.

The Supreme Being eludes the grasp of the highly evolved deities, whose manifold activities, He directs; yet He pervades the tiniest atoms, for so subtile is His nature.

He even stands as the repository of varied faiths and creeds. The hierarchy of Gods directing the varied operations in the universe is powerless without the supreme Lord's Grace which alone can energise them into activity, and thereby maintain the world in steady equilibrium.

The Lord's Grace does not rest upon those Gods, who move in the higher pinnacles of existence. His love is best understood through manifested objects, even among the lowliest on the scale of "being". He reveals Himself in beneficent forces like the sun, moon, sky, earth, fire and water, whose actions fructify the existence of even minutest creations.

"He it is who vouchsafes the sun its illumination.
He it is who gives the moon its exhilarating coolness.
In the mighty fire, He kindles the flaming heat.
His pervasive power, He places in the ether.
Endues the gambolling wind with energy meet;
Imparts savour to the life-giving waters bright:
And to the visible earth, He imbues strength;
Thus to millions of everlasting beings and agencies,
He infuses to each its own peculiar nature.

(1.20) (1.24) (1.27)

THE VISTA-VISION

The universe is the colossal stage which brings God and man together. The processes of evolution, preservation, dissolution and involution bring out the greatness of Lord Siva, who stands beyond His operations on the universe, transcendent, and at the same time, He pervades the minutest atoms in the world. The myriads of planets and countless

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lives therein, swinging on the "Tattwas" or categories of the Siddhantin, resolve at His supreme will, like the floating specks seen through the ray of light, as it streaks through the narrow crevice of the house. This poem deals primarily with the operations of the Lord on this theatre of the world. He gives to each, its moving force. In every object in the world, He pervades as fragrance in flower or symphony in music. The Lord of the universe is the *poetry of existence*, and can best be understood through the objects of nature.

The Lord's immeasurable attributes and His manifold manifestations, the poet extols as an outlet to the exuberance of his overwhelming love for the Lord, whom praises cannot encompass. If so, why does St. Manivachakar persist in repeatedly adoring Him? While the Lord is distantly aloof to those who do not love Him, He is so intimately close to those who seek Him in love and humility!

HIS REVELATIONS

How does He reveal Himself to his true devotees? There is no doubt that this man of God not merely walked in the light of His presence, but that he also experienced the divine presence.

> Verily have I seen Him with my own eyes — Behold!
> The Ambrosial source yielding bountiful grace, Behold!
> The splendour of His Grace, I beheld. Ye too Behold!
> On earth, His blessed Feet did tread, Behold!
> And realising Him as Siva Beloved, I felt the peace, Behold!
> When in Grace, He made me His — Behold!
> He who is the Lord of the Blue-eyed Sakti.
> Behold! The eternal Feminine and Him!
>
> (1.58) (1.60)

In such memorable words, St. Manivachakar described his revelation and conveys the unutterable joy that was his —

> "I saw Him — Yes, I saw my Fount of Grace.
> At the touch of felicity, my happiness knew no bounds".

The crowning experience of the poet is set forth in a beautiful allegory of the cloud, symbolic of the grace of the Lord.

The mere recollection of the gift of unalloyed happiness from the Great Giver, impels the poet to pour out his grateful

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love in adoration, simple and sublime. In the most tuneful and worshipful prayer, he magnifies the Beloved's elusive and direct relationships with man and the world. He implores the Lord who has filled his body, mind and soul with ethereal Love, that he can no longer endure the burden of the human frame. The human body cannot contain His great Love, and therefore that barrier should be reft asunder.

'I know not how to endure this ineffective mortal coil'.

THE ALLEGORY

In the tropical lands of the East, the rain-bearing cloud is the harbinger of happiness to man. From the infinite sea of felicity, the cumulus cloud arises; it symbolises the Lord of Mercy whose lightning flashes are displayed on the Heavens; filled with fear, the serpents who represent the powers of the senses succumb to the intense heat (of sorrow). Thunder ushers the monsoon showers (of grace) and the parched earth assumes a picture of loveliness. The 'Gloriosa Superba' stretches out its slender form, emitting the sweet honey of Love and this also reminds one, of the devotees in their loving act of homage. The herd of deer that depict the seekers after truth, seek to quench their thirst and are deluded by the mirage of false religious beliefs and hasten to and fro, when descends the heavy rains of mercy. They quench their thirst and glide across the stream overcoming barriers of births, uprooting huge trees of good and ill deeds, and filling the mountain lakes which represent the hearts of saints, on whose banks blossom flowers and where the hum of bees is heard.

The appeal of this allegory lies in its simplicity. The mighty descent of the monsoon showers is contrasted with that of the quiet beauty of the lake-side. The poet wishes to convey the idea that the active force of 'Grace' turns into passive tranquillity, as it invades the hearts of saints. Before the lake stretches the field of worship, where the homely ploughmen who are labourers in the service of God are assured of the waters of Grace and sow the grains of love. The poet leaves it to our imagination to visualise the rich harvest and the feast of fulfilment enjoyed by these seekers, a fitting reward indeed. (1.93)

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"God, the ocean of Grace,
Transformed Himself into a cloud
and came down in torrents at Tiruperunturai.....
To the delight of the thirsty mortals."

(1.66-68) (82)

BEHIND THE VEIL

The poet turns his attention from the allegory and resumes the language of the direct address. The Lord eludes analysis and plays hide-and-seek on earth with those that seek Him. No words can convey His true Being. Yet the poet has known a sure way of attaining His Feet. (1.124-140)

It is only through the path of Love that man can establish a true relationship with Him. (1.42)

There is a deep sense of pathos as we listen to the poet lisping in childlike melody:

"The hiding player — There I've seen you".

(1.142)

What follows this great discovery? We hear the child's peals of laughter, restless ejaculations and tears of joy. With the flaming heat of personal experience, Manivachakar re-captures in poetry, the ecstatic rapturous joy of his first meeting of the Beloved. The language, the irregular metre, the witchery of sense and sound break on the precipitous rocks of spiritual awakening of a love that passeth human understanding.

Haste, Oh haste with the garland.
Bind His Feet:
Encircle, gather round, follow and leave not
Clasp Him, tho' He eludes.
The incomparable One trumpeted His coming,
Made me His own —
A Sage He came and showed Himself to me.

(1.142)

Love undying, dissolved my bones and gushed out
Like the roaring of the tempestuous waves
That rise so high and eddy away.
In utter bewilderment, I rolled,
Reeled like a madman, a drunkard;
The world was puzzled; amazed at my frenzy

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Which surpassed that of a wild elephant.
Then as if it were to counteract my melting state,
He injected the toxin of honey.

(L.150)

In this garland of love, he conveys not only his forlorn feeling but also that of the still sad music of humanity. He portrays his sinking into a quietude of yearning by a series of negative terms. (1.157)

"I cannot evaluate thy grace to me.
Tasting it, I am not full;
Quaffing it, I feel impoverished.

(1.166)

What a Promethean struggle it was for the poet to imbibe the divine ambrosia!

"On full moon nights, the billows heave
Tossing up high tides — so too my heart
Bubbles with the felicity of His Grace. It enters
The sinews and pores of my bones, the interstices of
my hair cells.

(1.168)

Such wondrous ambrosia brims from my vile body
Oozing thro' the parts, so as to make me
Melt with ecstatic delight: my mortal frame
From head to foot has become one heart!

(1.174)

Mercy's distilled sweetness mingled in me
And He fed me with the nectar of Grace!
He who is elusive to Brahma and Mal.

(1.182)

VERILY HAVE I SEEN HIM

One of the finest autobiographical expositions of Tiruvachakam is the closing part of this psalm, where we see the poet with the keys of heaven, opening the doors of joyful communion with the Supreme Lord.

His poetry exults in the glory of personal experience. To the oft repeated question — "Have you seen the Beloved? The Lord of your aspirations, the source of knowledge and

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truth — in short, Have you seen God?" — we hear St. Manikkavachakar's answer in this Canto. "Yes! Verily have I seen Him, and this is how I have experienced His Presence."

CHAPTER XII

POTRI TIRU AHAVAL — THE GARLAND OF PRAISE
PLACE — TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE — THE PROGRESSION OF HUMAN LIFE

In this psalm, the poet sings the song of praise to the Lord, for graciously guiding man through the vicissitudes and uncertainties of life. It is a faithful record of a pilgrim's progress from the mother's womb to the light of God, the emergence of the life of man through successive stages, guided by the ever sustaining power of Grace. The poet's pledge of dogged surrender to the Feet of God is but a feeble attempt to signify his immeasurable debt of grateful love to the Giver of Life, Love eternal and Light. This is the last of four psalms of Adoration, and in it is heard the crescendo of praise — 'All Hail' — to the Lord in His transcendent and immanent forms. The quartet weaves the immortal garland of salutation and forms the most popular of all the songs in Tiruvachakam.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THY HOLY FEET

1. *While the four-faced Brahma and other celestial devas implore,*
He measureth the three worlds with His sacred Feet —
While Seers from all four quarters adore Him with their senses five,
He — Beauteous Mal — whose head doth gleam with rays,
He doth assume the guise of a boar and set forth to probe

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The seven regions of the underworld, till sore exhausted
He exclaimed "Eternal Source of Being, Prostrations to Thee".
Yet even so, Thou who did'st hide Thy beauteous Feet to Him
Art easy of access to thy lowly worshippers in this sea-girt earth.

THE HUMAN EMBODIMENT, WITH PERILS ENCIRCLED

In the cycle of life from an ant to that of an elephant,
Thro' many matrices escaping;
In human birth within my mother's womb,
From the struggle of germinal fertility escaping;
In the first month from cleaving in twain escaping;
In the second from dissolving in unison escaping
In the third, from the secretions external escaping;
In the fourth, from enveloping darkness escaping
In the fifth, from fear of extermination escaping;
In the sixth, from the evils of exposure escaping
In the seventh, from the toils of premature birth escaping;
In the eighth from the perils of pressure escaping;
In the ninth from being entwined in the trails of birth escaping
In the tenth with mother enjoined --
From the woeful seat of birth, its pangs escaping;
Thus did I emerge and grow from year to year.
In youth avoiding many hurdles and limitations,
Morning's ablutions, noontide hunger and slumber
at nights; From strange adventures evading; —
Darksome tresses, crimson lips, winsome smiles
In gentleness like the peacocks of summer,
Their heaving bodies swaying up and down
In beauteous expansive rhythm in and out;
From such tempting allurements
Of these bewitching fair damsels escaping;
In a dizzy world of toil and moil where men pine

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After manifold desires, from their enslavement
shunning;
From the great seas of erudition, its perils eluding
As also from the distressing effect of wealth,
From the age-old stings of penury averting,
And inglorious ties for trifling gains, eschewing.

THE DAWN OF CONSCIOUSNESS OF GOD

Whence the consciousness of the divine awakened in me
The thought of the Supreme One, untouched by
Malice —
Ah! myriads of delusive forces exerted in full
Their potentialities in varied interplay;
Those friends and neighbours would congregate
And propagate atheist ideas so eloquently.
Relatives, even as the herd of lambs in fraternity bound,
Sought in attachment to encircle me in their ties.
The penance of fasting, the orthodox priests vindicate
quoting the scriptures as the highest way of truth.
While the religious fanatics, each his own creed
Extol as having discovered Truth.
The agnostic proclaims his doctrine unequivocally,
In terrific onslaught like the whirling hurricane.
The materialist lends charm to his heresies,
Like the glistening snake that emits deadly poison,
And holds sway by the power of his delusive subtle-
ties.

IN THE STAGE OF THE WORLD

In this psalm, the process of human embodiments in the womb and its progress in the world are worked out in great detail. The poet traces the journey of the soul of man through countless births; the undercurrent of the Lord's guidance in the varied stages of development is brought out by the forcible and recurring use of the word, 'Escaping' in the sense of "perils escaped". The descent into the human womb, the various impediments to its growth therein, the danger it has to tide through in its infancy, its escape from the havoc of maidens' alluring glances, its combats with

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prosperity and adversity, its escape from the dangers of false learning — these are delineated in picturesque imagery. Each danger is given a suitable metaphorical import as in,

> "From the sea of erudition, its perils escaping,
> From the distressing ills of wealth escaping,
> From the age-old stings of poverty escaping".
>
> (38-40)

Besides these perils that attend a man in the physical, intellectual and social planes, he has to fight the good fight in the objective and subjective realms, grappling with problems in the kingdom of the mind within and in the world outside. The poet analyses "the awakening thought of the Lord", with all the attending tensions and conflicts of a life of piety in the spiritual sphere. Here too man has to stem through ever widening difficulties. The saintly poet in a reminiscential mood recalled the battle of the wits who represented the various schools of Philosophy such as atheism, idealism and materialism — each advocating its doctrines, thereby causing confusion to the true seekers after infinite bliss.

Each sect claimed the superiority of its own doctrines; the brahmins claimed importance to their rituals and fastings, while others placed the path of devotion and piety as the true way to bliss. The idealist believed the world to be a mirage and set the soul on an equality with God. The materialist trumpeted the doctrine of epicureanism. Through all these tortuous paths, St. Manivachakar must have trod as a young and aspiring scholar and as a Minister of State, he would have witnessed in the capital city of Madura, the flourishing academies of these different schools of Thought and might have been lured into their way of belief, till the God-Guru appeared to him in human form and revealed to him the true knowledge and thereby conferred on him everlasting bliss.

The effect of his illumination by the God-Guru is described in memorable poetry. "He donned on the armour of enlightened love for the journey, the goal of which was to reach the Feet of God." The state of the poet is similar to that of the lover's pursuit; after a long and hapless search, the beloved in the end reveals Himself. The slender

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form, tearful eyes, lips murmuring his name, voice faltering, sensitive and tremulous, and hands clasped like the lotus bud and heart expanding like the full-blown flower. This is a superb example of our saintly poet's transfiguration. To those who yearn for the presence of the Lord, He comes to them as the protecting mother.

THE GREAT SURRENDER AT THE FEET OF THE GURU

L. 59. But letting not go what had been grasped,
Heart in prayer, melting like wax in sight of fire,
Weeping, trembling, dancing, shouting,
Singing, praising, gripping like jaws of babe
What was clutched; as a nail cleaves

65. The tender plants, so with pure ceaseless love
swelling, overflowing, tossing sea like,
Heart softening, body quivering
The world at me as a mad man laughing,
Lost to shame, the town's ridicule my ornament,
Unswerving, of appearance heedless,
Eager with yearning to know
My goal, the supreme wonder—
In pain and wilderment, like calf for its mother crying
Even in dream, thinking not of other God.

75. Not making light of the gracious coming on earth
Of the supreme peerless One as Teacher,
In Love, His holy Feet I cling like shadow
Inseparably going before and after, and
For ever looking towards the peaceful one.

80. Bones melting, heart in agony of suspense,
The stream of Love, its bank overflowing,
The senses subdued crying aloud
'O Lord', words faltering, hair standing on end,
Hands clasped in worship, heart blossoming.

85. Eyes filling with tears of joy,
Daily nurturing His unfading Love—
To such as these Oh Lord, art Thou mother
And them, Thou dost protect, Glory to Thee.
Who doth cancel deeds of ours, in truth a sage,

90. King of golden Madura! All Hail to Thee!

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LIST TO THE SESSIONS OF SWEET RHAPSODY

From this stage to the end of the psalm, the poet soars on the wingless melody of adoration of His Peerless Guru. He exults in His Personal and Impersonal aspects, as revealed in the world of scriptures, and in the heart of man down the ages.

"His objective majesty and subjective reality,
an Indweller in the sacred shrines of his motherland;
The unique One, transcending word and understanding,
Who art ruler of all the realms:"

165

Then in moving strains, the poet breaks into a prayer for the Lord's limitless grace and light:

"Father, that Thou should'st grant thy grace, I praise Thee!
Lord, that Thou should'st dispel my darkness, I praise Thee!

168

Thy servant am I — herein I pine forlorn, All praise to Thee.

170

In Grace purge me from my guile — all praise to Thee.
In Grace, bid me 'Fear not' — all praise to Thee!"

172

Finally with the majesty of the Himalayan sunset, the poet brings to a close the symphony of rapturous praise on the hushed note of quiet repose and peace:

"Praise Thee — who dost dispel
The bewilderment of those that worship Thee!
Accept in Grace, this garland of pure poesy
From me, despised one, who knows not to discern the truth.
Glory, Glory to Thee".

218

DISTANT ECHOES

Sir P. Arunachalam draws an interesting parallel with the poem of Walt Whitman, where the poet relates the planetary development and the gradual emergence of life through its successive ages, until it stands as a conscious soul:

"I am the acme of things accomplished.
Afar down, I see the huge first nothing.

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I know I was even there.
Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.
Before I was born out of my mother
Generations guided me.....
My embryo has never been torpid.
All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me,

Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul".

In the same touching manner, Manikkavachakar tells us in this psalm of praise, the progress of the human soul and the guidance he had received from his Supreme Guru in his march to celestial happiness. Herein lies the quintessence of religious poetry that sustains us in the darkest hours when all other props one by one, drop on the wayside;

"My rendezvous is appointed — it is certain;
The Lord will be there and wait till I come,
On perfect terms,
The great camarado, the lover for whom
I pine will be there".

WE LOOK BEFORE AND AFTER

In this section on the "Poetry of Adoration", St. Manivachakar deals with the central theme of his life — the realisation of God — the grandest goal of all human life. These four poems (i) Sivapuranam, (ii) Keerti Tiru Ahaval, (iii) Thiruvandap Paguthi and (iv) Potri Tiru Ahaval form a garland of praise to the Supreme Lord, who is the Inspiration of Tiruvachakam and constitute a unit of composition. The Lord is adored as Namasivaya in the first poem and as Deva-Deva, Siva-Sakti, and God-Guru respectively in the three psalms that follow.

The poet celebrated the first coming of the Lord into his life and projected the vision that was vouchsafed to him in the four different cantos: Sivapuranam gives prominence to the vision at Tiru-Perunturai and the initiation by the God-Guru, whose transcendent nature is extolled. In Keerthi Tiru Ahaval is rendered the praise of the Lord's manifestations of grace to his devotees and especially to the poet from the

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sacred abode of Tillai. Tiruvanda Pahuthi deals with the phenomenal universe, the stage where man and nature enact their drama of existence. It is also the stage where the Lord's Grace, in other words His Sakti, the operation of his immanence, stands revealed and we behold the many-sided relationship of the Lord with the world of matter and man. The autobiographical references to the coming of the God-Guru and the poet's experience of the crowning mercy of the Lord make this poem rich with the music of exquisite Love.

In Potri Tiru Ahaval is delineated the many vicissitudes of the man of God on earth. Human birth is not entirely "a sleep and a forgetting". The magnitude of the perils and dangers, hair-breadth escapes that encounter man on his sojourn in this world, awe us and create in us the irresistible yearning after that supreme object of Adoration, who alone can lead us from darkness to light eternal, from change, decay and death to immortality of Bliss. It is the Lord's Grace alone that can shelter us from the fearful storms of life. He comes, comes, ever comes; He who eludes the reach of even the Gods, to take His abode in the hearts of His true devotees out of the abundance of His undying Love. He cherishes one and all His frail children and protects them from perils unending, with the sweet and unfailing vigilance and tenderness of a Mother.

The special charm of these four cantos which compose the poetry of adoration lies in its power to evoke in us a longing for the infinite, a yearning that meets with fulfilment only in the repetition of the invocation, 'Sivayanama' day by day. The enchanting incantation of the Lord after the style of the Yajur Veda, evoke in us a sense of pure enjoyment and that is the all-rewarding object of the author of Tiruvachakam. In his poetry of Adoration, he trumpets to the world that they also *realise him who only sing HIS praise continuously*.

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THE POETRY OF EXPERIENCE

T. L. 4

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CHAPTER XIII

TIRUCHATAKAM: THE SUBLIME CENTO

BEFORE AND AFTER

In the light of realisation after his initiation by the God-Guru, our Poet sang jubilantly the psalms on Siva, in the first quartet of Tiruvachakam entitled "The Poetry of Adoration". At His holy Feet, we saw the poet offering his garland of praise and from it was born this rubhayat of hundred odes known also as the "Cento of Divine Beatitude". In this "Cento", his unflinching devotion to his Guru blossoms afresh, as he bids adieu to his life as a minister of state.

In a mood of detachment, freed from the thronging desires of a man of the world, the poet in rapt astonishment muses on the different phases of mystic love. Who could fathom its depths? Who could explore the recesses of the mind of a man standing at the threshold of supreme surrender to the Divine Love? St. Manikkavachakar's heart is like a perennial fountain from whose springs flow the purest and holiest Love. It eludes analysis. In Tiruchatakam, we see the pageant of the most moving, passing strange and magnetic of all human relationships, that of a Siva bhakta who beholds the light of Siva manifested in human form, and at whose sacred Feet, he pledges eternal love and servitude.

THE BLOOMS

Holy Love (Bhakti) is the divine principle which energises the mind of Manivachakar. In Tiruchatakam, we watch his response to the blessedness of his illumination by his Guru, obtaining which he becomes intoxicated, transfixed and bound. He recounts in the hundred odes of this Cento, that neither the Devas nor the Asuras can break asunder this silken cord of supreme surrender to his sovereign Lord and Master. We understand but dimly the beauty of his renunciation, that

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stepping aside to all worldly ties and attachments, and the magnitude of his devotion to the Guru. "Refuge have I none but Thee".

There are many approaches to Truth. Diverse are the avenues that lead man to the Feet of God but the most significant and surest path is through the way of Love according to all sages and seers. Tirumular in 'Tirumantiram' wrote that the heart must melt in love to relish the supreme Love. In the last ode on the Lyric of Release, Manivachakar says:

> "With those fiery ones who know not that Blessed Path
> I was groping till He showed me the way of Love."

In the third quartet on the Rhapsody on Siva there is a memorable line on the efficacy of true devotion:

> "He can only be caught
> By the net of Love."

It is believed that The Sublime Cento was composed at Tirupperunturai soon after the Guru and his devotees had departed. "They vanished 'neath the awakening light in the pond, off the Kuruntha tree", from where he had beheld his Guru first. Forlorn and sad, he composed this Cento, believing that "in the net of love, His Beloved would somehow be caught." He offers ten bouquets of love in these ten decads. The bard's poesy articulates every small detail of his quest and his grand conquest. The tones of disgust and pathos, reverence and wonder ebb and flow, as the mighty lover depicts his subtlest reactions to a variety of contacts with the world, and we pant and halt at his relentless pursuit after the unifying principle of love. If we do not understand it, it is not because we are ignorant of the underlying philosophy, but that we are blind to the vision of Love.

THE ASCENT

The first ten stanzas known as a decad speak of the dawn of divine illumination. The only preparation necessary to lead one to this ladder is to relinquish all possessions, material and mental, and seek nothing. The rhythmic ebb and flow of aspiration and rejection of Manivachakar constitute his initial Quest on the Dawn of Truth.

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The second posy unfolds the petals of discernment. The degree of advance towards the Beloved depends upon true knowledge and an intensely positive state of mind of the devotee. The injunctions of the scriptures and rituals should be followed until his conviction has become firm and well rooted.

The third stage in this holy ascent is the first rap of love within himself. Doubts and fears assail him. Is it possible for a man to merge himself entirely in universal love? The question also involves another problem. Is it all "Thou" or the impersonal "That"? Can there be dual throbs between himself and the world of persons and things? The answer is given in the third lyric entitled "Dying unto self", when he discerns "*this* body" instead of "*my* body."

In the fourth stage, his devotion to the Divine Master is accentuated by worship, by discourses on the Beloved, by remembrance of His sustaining initiation, and above all by the realisation of the need for purging the mind of all grossness and baseness. "Purify my outer and Inner self, Oh Light serene," is his refrain in this decad.

The fifth stage depicts the surrender of all his actions to the Beloved Guru. His suffering becomes most acute when perchance he forgets Him. He consecrates his body, mind and spirit at His Feet. "I tender to Thee my all."

The sixth avenue reveals the loneliness at his separate existence from the Beloved. The attendant miseries of separation, and the lure of distractions caused by the ephemeral things of the world gnaw upon his peace.

In the seventh step of the mystic ascent, we find the devotee exhausted and he prays for the all-embracing balm of divine love that shall steady him in his doubts. "That I may not falter, look upon me with tender love."

Then the veil of darkness begins to recede and the bard walks in the light of grace flowing from the Divine mount. In meekness most lowly, he presses forward. So sweet is his experience as he realises his nearness to the "Unfolding of Bliss," and this is the eighth step in his journey upward.

In the ninth decad, we see the pilgrim of eternity with a halo of purity, as he takes his stride with the holy companions

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of the most exalted Beloved. This association with the band of illumined devotees uplifts him and he sings the beauteous decad on "The rapture of Realisation."

Finally he reveals the last stage of all, "The ecstasy of Bliss." Inexpressible is the rapture of this experience, as he soars on the topmost peak of beatific bliss.

Long and arduous had been his ascent. By constant remembrance of his Beloved and by spontaneous acts of charity, purifying his heart of all dross, and weeping at the suffering of his fellow beings on earth, tossed by the allurements of this world and chastising himself through remorse and reproach for every shortcoming in his devotion, he at last reaches the mount of sublime peace. The last ode in this Canto seeks to portray a state of Peace that passeth understanding — a blissful experience indeed.

A seeker of Truth having obtained the object of his search sees that alone, hears that alone, speaks of that alone and thinks of that alone. The Scribe of Eternal love regards himself as the humble *servant* of humanity. He is ready to render service to all beings and thus serve God! He is at once a servant as well as a lover, who with choking voice expresses the infinite articulations of sacrifice and love.

How effectively and touchingly does our Poet unveil the secret recesses of the heart, the impalpable suggestions, the silent mutations, the mental labyrinth of motives and pretexts. Manikkavachakar depicts in the odes on the Sublime Cento, the most sacred as well as the most opprobrious shrines of the inner man. The progress of the soul is traced in few marked stages and the hundred stanzas occupy a unique place in Tiruvachakam and in Hindu Philosophy, in that they contain the quintessence of the poet's experience of Truth. Every line is impregnated with his love for his God-Guru who had initiated him at Tirupperunturai. "At all times, love is the highest common factor in life."

THE FIRST ASCENT. DECAD 1.

The Awakening

'Grant me Love to Love Thee who art Love'

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The ten verses in this decad dwell on the act of awakening to love and truth by a seeker after Reality. The Poet describes his experience in the first stanza thus:

"Rocked in a cold shiver, before thy
Fragrant feet, lowly I bow
With arms uplifted and tears streaming
Forth. Lo! I arise
From dreams of fleeting joys to praise
Thee Lord, to adore Thee
With flaming Love. Thus thy bondsman
Clings to Thee. Master, Look on me in grace."

5. 1. 1.

When the Grace of God illumines his life, the false and fleeting nature of his body, its caprices and wayward moods begin to oppress the young pilgrim.

THE TRUE AND THE FALSE

The Poet begins to be critically aware that fleeting is the body and fleeting its pleasures thereof; he also begins to be powerfully attracted to the repository of Truth, the Beloved Guru who had subjugated him so completely by the power of Love.

In each of the ten stanzas of this lyric is delineated the effect of this impact with his Guru, on his actions, attitudes and outlook, the effect on the world around him, the effect on his future progress, his fears and hopes, his purposes and relationships. His surrender is often intermingled with an element of surprise, humility and awe. He extols his victorious Master for the conquest of his stubborn self. That He should bear with all his frailties and accept him for ever as His bondsman, is his refrain in this decad.

THE PILGRIM LOVER

Manivachakar strengthens his resolution in the following stanza:

'Hell — I'll not despise nor heavenly bliss aspire.
With thy happy band of pilgrims to inspire,
Life's lures will I not heed, if guided by thy grace.
To none will I bow, my blessed Master but Thee'.

5. 1. 2.

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In tuneful songs, he vows that his discipleship would be spent in service to his Master-Gem.

"Thy humble bondsman looks on Thee as the Summum Bonum
Of Goodness; My father, my sovereign Lord —
In anguished love I pine."

5. 1. 3.

"To thy beauteous feet, let my life be dedicated
In service."

5. 1. 5.

Then comes the still small voice of the Beloved: 'My Love, what is thy supplication?' The poet's answer reverberates far and near:

'Oh Immaculate Love, enshrined in the hearts of Lovers!
May I serve and worship Thee, all in all —
That my love may for e'er blossom at thy feet,
Pour forth thy eternal Grace on me'.

5. 1. 6.

He tells us that his divine Master does not heed the homage of the devas; yet He heeds the helpless cries of his devotees; and so he appeals to the Lord of dissolution to save him from the servitude of deeds.

He reveals the joy of his intimate relationship as the prize of his renunciation, of absolute surrender unto his Beloved Guru.

"The liberator, He is my overlord.
Siva, my sovereign Lord... Knowing my littleness,
He is still my own. I declare:
His bondsman am I and such is His divine will.
The Lord of the universe is my Supreme Lord."

5 1. 9.

WHAT HAVE I RELISHED?

Having moved in the courtly walk of life, Manivachakar must have exercised his prerogative of overlordship over many people. This analogy is used by the poet to show that having now dedicated his service to the King of Kings, his relationship with Him is that of a slave to a master. Before

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his initiation, our poet might have relished the stimulus of wealth, authority and fame as the Prime Minister of the Pandya kingdom overflowing with milk and honey. With relief he laid aside the garb of power, laid aside the rituals of 'high living', jeered by many at his madness, he became the bondsman true of his mighty master who extends His primacy over the universe of man and devas.

His body, mind and word became so subjugated under the overpowering force of Guru-Bhakti (devotion to his Guru), that the refrain of his prayer is for more and yet more sustaining love for his Beloved. In the last stanza of this decad, he dwells on his unworthiness in contrast to His boundless Love. 'My flawless gem' elevates undeserved folks and degrades the heavenly band. 'Twas all thy comedy!' Thus ends the first stage in his mystic ascent.

In this decad, Manivachakar's awakening love made him conscious of

the truth of seeing the Beloved,
the truth of his stead-fast devotion to Truth,
the truth of His compassionate grace,
the truth of his own unworthiness,
the truth of his madness to the world,
the truth of his master-slave relationship,
the truth of his renunciation,
the truth of his consecration,
the truth of his yearning for the unquenchable love of his Guru,
and the truth of his pledge to serve at His bidding.

Such is the picture of the bard of Vathavur, an embodiment of intense devotion, trembling for the vanished light of the Guru who had initiated him into the mysteries of spiritual heritage.

THE SECOND STEP. DECAD 2.

Discerning True Knowledge

The Poet addresses his mind:

"Oh despicable Mind! Arise and go, go now after Him—
He who stole your heart and held supremacy there."
"Whither shall I look for Him, now that he has left me."

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Then came the answer in response to the lamentation of the poet.

"Look for Him in the immensity of Love,
In the firmament of true knowledge."

MY ACTING

The world is God's stage where He enacts His drama, with man as his chief actor. The poet closed the first decad by saying, " 'Twas all thy comedy!" In the opening stanza of the second lyric, however, he alludes to the part assigned to him in this drama.

Manivachakar has been singled out to play the role of a lover in search of his Beloved in this Divine Comedy. As is natural with inexperienced actors, we see that his acting is somewhat artificial, and he strides the stage restlessly and too fast. He becomes nervous and stands in need of spontaneity, born of true understanding.

"Give me Grace that I may love Thee unfalteringly;
That my love shall melt the interstices of my heart —
Oh, Thou Rock of precious Gems!"

5. 2. 11.

The Rock of God is contrasted with his frail and love-lorn frame. It was his firm conviction that if he were blessed with the "manna of grace", then he would not dread any ills or look for satisfaction elsewhere. Armed with the weapon of discernment, he felt sure he could play any role.

MY ROLE

"What is the role you wish to play?" asks His Beloved. "The role of a humble 'sevika' (servant) unto Thee", is the poet's reply in the second stanza. "But first give me thy manna of grace". A pure heart alone can worship Truth. Therefore the poet tells us that the discipline of observing the rules and rituals of devotion becomes a valuable sadhana (practice). Such preparation helps the inflow of His Love. "Though I lack all these practices, yet am I not thy serf? Thou who vanquished me! 'Twas Not my will! Oh for thy nectar!"

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BEWARE OF PITFALLS

"So dense have I become that my ignorance shadows my path; not following the hard and narrow path of service, I stumble into alluring pitfalls and distracting attachments. Help me to perform such righteous acts that would uplift me. Enlighten me to adore Thee as lord of the universe and yet to behold Thee as dwelling in every object in this universe; Lift me to see Thee in the elements, serve thee in life with understanding, experience thy relationship in all around; so that I may annihilate egoism which brings about the misery of separateness and greed. How shall I find thee as the mover of all things so near and yet so far, seen and unseen, and finding Thee, how shall I pay my obeisance?" 5. 2. 15. The poet disparages the avowed acts of the devas who seek the lord in order to gain more glory and power.

"I extol Thee so that Thou can'st save me
From the misery of a useless life".

He warns us against motives petty and selfish, that actuate our seemingly virtuous deeds. Have any of these heavenly hosts, Vedas, or even the so-called true devotees seen Him?

In poetic style and sentiment akin to the Alwars of 'Divya Prabantham', Manivachakar reveals the secret thrill of his first sight of his Beloved 'Guru' —

"The *mighty Almighty* laid hold on me
The lowliest of the low,
And *meekly* drew me 'neath His *lofty* feet."

5. 2. 18.

The stupendous incongruity of this impact makes him weep for death. What pathos is contained in his cry!

"I sink; I totter; Endure I cannot".

The voice of his Guru is heard in stillness and he is comforted:

"Why despair? The remedy lies in your hands".

The poet counsels wisdom to his wayward mind to steady itself by constant concentration on the object of his love. "You could not have lived Oh mind, if ye had not praised the glory of the Lord". The slow and leisurely rhythm of this

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lyric is appropriate to a soliloquy, where Manivachakar discerns the urgency for right understanding. In the third decad of Tiruchatakam, is worked out the steps by which man can attain right understanding.

CHAPTER XIV

TIRUCHATAKAM

THE THIRD ASCENT. DECAD 3.

Mortification of the Self

Is it all "I" or all "Thou"?

The poet is moved to follow the path of love, in order to assuage his sense of separation from the Supreme Self. Manivachakar relies on two main techniques to heighten his endeavour, as he climbs up the Mount of Love. The incomprehensible nature of his Beloved is constantly penetrated by the poet's references to vedic and agamic allusions, and by his many illustrations of traditional beliefs and rituals. Secondly, we have in sharp contrast the picture of himself, an object of abject insignificance, having been chosen as His "vassal" of love! He was unworthy and was not meant for this high calling. How could his frail mortality withstand the torrential flow from the source of Love? The result of this encounter is witnessed in his maddening sensations of gasping, panting, throttling, choking, benumbing, melting, resisting, escaping until in overwhelming awe, fear, disgust, pathos heroic, defiance and mirthsome frolic (the classic rasas of emotional experiences) he is strengthened to receive the offerings of Love divine. He was not ready for it but he was whipped into acceptance.

When Manikkavachakar realised that there was absolutely no way 'Out', and that his enslavement was absolute, vanquished as he was by the insuperable power of the Divine will, he gave up his isolation and separateness and it was then that he experienced His living presence within him. It was at this juncture that he began his ascent on the mystic mount of love, step by step. Since his enslavement, he had

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not even the prerogative to cast aside his body, for it was not "his own", and therefore he determined to make it a fitting temple of God. This was the refrain of the third decad on "a dying unto self". This spiritual unity synchronises with his third ascent up the mystic mount of love.

LOVE RESPIRES

A beautiful simile opens this section on the munificence of the lord's grace and the poet's reaction to it.

'Lord of the braided locks where Ganges is concealed.
Rider on the bull and king of heavenly hosts — Thus
Thy devotees adore Thee down the ages: Their hearts
Pant and leap like the torrent in a deep ravine
And yet Thou discarded them; And came to me.
Should I not melt in love as if my whole body
From head to foot were nothing but heart?
Should not my whole body be turned to eyes
So that showers of tears may stream forth?
Stony is my heart and my eyes are wooden sockets!

5. 3. 21.

The allusion to Siva as the bearer of the Ganges on His locks conveys the might of His grace, the panacea of all sufferings of man. The ardent fervour of the true devotees as described in the scriptures, is contrasted with the frigidity of the poet. From the poetic imagery of the transformation of his whole body into a trembling loving heart and eye, we are able to gauge the depth of the poet's feelings to his Beloved, and the stupor of his dazed self. Should he not turn his body into a single heart in order to relish the experience of love?

In the next verse, he continues to develop the same theme more fully.

"He came of His own accord.
He transfixed me; and bade me follow Him.
Seeing me engulfed in evil, He mitigated my ignorance.
The Reality thus revealed, He did enslave me.
And became my Overlord.

5. 3. 22.

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All the stages of love are described with precision, and the decad closes on a note of dejection:

"In spite of all these manifold acts of love
My response is that of an iron statue.
How shall this end?"

He begins to wonder why he was singled for holier purpose. 'Is it because I moved with thy devotees that Thou enslaved me? Or, because Thou could'st not find a better serf?' In the next verse is delineated a true 'Bhakta' who is immersed in the Lord's love and who worships Him in perfect surrender; and our poet quietly adds, "Along with His select votaries, He has included me also — one who is full of guile." 5. 3. 24.

I SAW

The bard proceeds to speak of that holy experience in his life about which he speaks to us a myriad times in Tiruvachakam, and never gets satiated. The Beloved Guru's ministry unto him is recalled with a poignancy that tugs at our heart's strings.

'Thy form I saw; Thy Beauty, Thy lotus feet too!
Thou guided me, lest I strayed.
How shall I ponder on Thee?'

5. 3. 25.

The answer in the next stanza strikes the chord of dedication and self surrender:

"My gift of thought is offered to thy domain of Thought.
Myself, lowliest of the low.
Thy luminous gracious form, I see in aught;
My eyes take lustre from thine.
These acts blossom as worship at thy beauteous feet.
The spoken word of mine
Hallowed it be, as the precious pledge of Thy *word*:
Well tuned are the senses five
To enjoy thy symphony. Thou translumed me thus.
Oh Thou irresistible,
Insatiable ocean of Love! Majestic Rock of Ages!
Thine are these gifts
To me, Oh spark eternal, whose visible presence

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Dazzles aloft
Like a dense forest of flaming red lotuses.
This solitary self,
Bereft of duality seeks its repose in Thee.

5. 3. 26.

The beauty of this autobiographical touch, the poet's entire consecration is conveyed in meaningful poesy, intense and vivid. This stanza is a gem of rare lustre. The poet wields a thorough control over speech rhythms and under his spell, they glow or harden, change their focus and tempo. He speaks of the presence of the lord, the light beautiful in form compared to the flame of roseate lotuses in myriads, as entering his heart. This reminds us of Dante's simile of "The white Rose of the Blest" to describe the blessed in Paradise in his 'Divine Comedy.' Thought, word and deed, he offered at His Feet. That light so dazzling has made him blind to the other sources of lesser lights.

"All that I am, All springs from Thee
Thou source of my Life. Thou art the Giver and I am the receiver

If only I could use thy gifts in thy service!"

This is the prayer of Manivachakar.

The Beloved in mystic response stirs the reply: "Have I not answered your prayer in giving myself to Thee?" The lover chimes in thus,

"Alas! sun of my life, who leads me by the light of thy love!
Shake my gloom, my bondage and futile deeds.
My Plea is not to gain the freedom of "Being and Becoming",
But to be thy bondsman, basking in the sunshine of Thy Grace.

This is the perfect expression in Poetry of the accomplished *end*. Its penetrating Truth pulsates through the whole of Tiruvachakam, though in this particular lyric of exquisite poetry, the poet's bliss of realisation attains a high water-mark of Rasa, the culmination of aesthetic and spiritual experience.

Then the poet turns his gaze objectively and addresses his brethren on the world's stage. A worldling he was, subject

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to conceit, pride of wealth, learning and position, and allured by the fascination of the fair sex. Yet withal, he practised the chanting of the holy rosary. The *raft* of the 'Five letters', he tells in an allegory, carries him, till he gets into a *boat*, steered by the Guru as his boatswain. There were other boats also of the goodly saints keeping him company, till one day boatswain and boats disappeared, and he was left alone — alone, all alone in the dark sea of life to voyage.

5. 3. 27.

In this state of weariness, he was directed to perfect his love so that his Beloved might vouchsafe His grace, as he did at first when,

"On earth before all the people
He raised me, unworthy as I am,
Upon a dais and not only that —
He disclosed secrets unknown to all;
Then interrogated me with questions rare,
Safeguarded me from births and saved me."

5. 3. 28.

In these last four lines of this decad, the pilgrim-poet proclaims his happiness after his "I surrender" act. As he enters the fourth step in his Ascent, he is seen in the happy company of holy saints.

"Subject to none are we, naught do we fear;
Surge we ahead in the company of His devotees
Dipping and sporting in the pool of Grace."

5. 3. 30.

THE FOURTH STEP. DECAD 4.

The Soul's Purification

"My Beloved: Why do I not see Thee?"

This Ode is in the form of an address to the soul. The didactic element predominates while the poetic style is veiled in a moral tone. The pilgrim admonishes the soul to abandon its sluggish apathy and purify itself by righteous service. The tide of frustration and despondency must be countered by active meritorious deeds. His Master gave him the sweetest gifts of love and yet he was tempted to be treacherous, ungrateful, nay, deceitful. The nature of the mind is to be fickle, capricious, but "He is sure to claim me."

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The poet does not understand nor can fathom his own mind, and hence he uses hard-sounding epithets to chastise his mind; yet his revulsion at his own self is in strange juxtaposition with the epithets he uses to bring to the sessions of sweet silent thought, his remembrance of his Guru's love. "God's love blooms like the tender buds from the shoots of trees in spring."

That his insensible mind pulls him in the wrong track is reiterated in this decad, and helps to prove the annoyance and vexation of the poet at his inability to shed all worldly attachments, to melt in love, to enter the blessed abode of saintly lovers, and to enjoy bliss. Purity of soul is essential to ascend the mystic mount of love. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Separation from the Beloved Guru and all the suffering it entails are not of His Will, but are due to the imperfections of man, the lover. In lines echoing the Hound of Heaven, Manivachakar says that it is not in the Divine Scheme to permit separation and the consequent pangs of suffering even for an infinitesimal fraction of a grain! 5. 4. 37. The thorn of separation hurts him but he attributes it to his impure heart, and not to God's will. 'Create in me a pure heart, O God! and implant thy Grace within me', becomes his constant refrain as he yearns to feel his great Love. Intervals of separation from his beloved appear an intolerable length of time! Life appears a cruel exile. Days fly. Then the poignant cry of a love-lorn lady-love is heard. This is the mystic's lamentation in the dark valley of doubt and darkness: "Where, Oh where is my lord and Beloved"?

"The Past dissolves and those yesterdays give place
To many todays since Thou gave thy golden-blossomed Feet.
To this contemptuous self, lower than the tribe of dogs,
Thou pointed the way of love. In greater measure than a Mother

My sweet Lord showered on me the bliss of love.
Him I see not now. Why don't I fall into the fire?
Or roll from the mountain top! To the depths of the sea
Oh! I'll sink."
5. 4. 39.

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Sorrow and remorse so work upon Manivachakar that he longs to put an end to his misery. A fall from a rock or a dive deep down to the sea, even a plunge into the fire seem lesser of the evil to assuage his pang of separation from the Lord.

"Like broken curds under the churning rod,
I am whirled in the midst of alluring desires.
Oh, the folly of abiding in the body!"

5. 4. 40.

ON THE FIFTH STEP. DECAD 5.

In Return.

"Not my will but Thine."

Where has his despondency lead him? Into the valley of Doubt, the poet finds himself and gives us the reason for his lamentation in the opening lyric of the fifth decad:

"Wallowing in bodily desire like the huge elephant,
Forgetful I become, and I see Thee not, life of my life.
Pain is all I see. Thou bade me 'come'. Almighty Lord!
Give me the boon to taste thy ambrosial bliss."

5. 5. 41.

A purified heart, a life of purity alone can be a noble offering to the lord. That alone can be a fitting *Return* to the lord's boundless love. Only a pure soul can commingle with the peerless purity of the lord. This is the burthen of his song in this decad. The poet paints a lurid picture of the life of man on earth. Gripped in the pleasures of the fair damsels, a youthful prey to the vultures of desire, squandering the 'living present' in eating and sleeping, man forfeits his inner peace. The "essence of life" recedes from his ken. Pain spreads its tentacles. Thus tossed by grief, ingratitude and idleness, man pines for the solace of a spiritual Guru.

The Poet's memory of his Guru rivives his urge to see Him and render a 'fit return' of "a pure and contrite heart."

"To Thy humble serf, Thou did'st reveal Thy true self.
I saw Thee once, I see Thee not now. Oh, the deceit
Of my eyes! When shall I see Thee again."

5. 5. 42.

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He recalls as a way of assuaging his own distress at his separation from the Guru, the many instances of His immeasurable love to the Devas and mortals who had sought His refuge. He who is without beginning and end has shown His compassionate love even to the piglings. Did not that immortal hero, Markandeyar of the puranas, call Thee to his succour, when he was threatened by Yama, the God of Death?

"I cannot boast of any surpassing love,
But, like Yama who yielded his sway at the touch of thy love,
Do I not deserve thy benignant grace, Thou Saviour of souls,
My supplication is that those who err should also be saved."
5. 5. 45.

In every stanza in this decad, the poet describes the various stages whereby the lover pursued the great Beloved. Their inter-relationships, the degrees of nearness and distance to each other worked out in fine poetic imagery make a powerful appeal to the readers. The poetry of Manivachakar thus knits these truths in obedience not to common but to transcendental laws, since it serves something which is outside human experience.

Lest we who are not gifted with his vision should think him a madman, lest we feel tempted to taint his pure poetry with the alloy of misunderstanding his purposes, Manivachakar resorts to repetition, and recounts the marvels of his experience relating to his illumination; for it is that crucial event that laid the foundation of his poetry, philosophy and religion. At every turn he recalls the wondrous event by ever-new approaches:

"Liberating me from bondage, Thou didst draw me to Thee.
Thy faithful lovers and devotees true *saw*
Thee elevating me to thy Hall of Saints,
And exalting me who am Ignorance personified."
5. 5. 49.

"For this thy gracious act, what have I done in return?" This is the poet's sobbing cry.

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The poet was initiated by the Teacher of wisdom to follow the path of Knowledge. He closes this decad on a note of simple dedication, which epitomises the axioms of "Siva-Gnana-Bodham" of Meykanda Deva, the Open Sesame to the understanding of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

"O lord of wisdom! Ambrosia Eternal!
Did'st Thou mistake my debased self to be pure,
That Thou chose me Thy serf?
Or did'st Thou know my true state of ignorance?
Will I follow thy teaching? or will I retrace?
Oh, for the nectar of Thy Grace!"

5. 5. 50.

The light of Wisdom is embodied in the God-head. Man symbolises the darkness of Ignorance in his pristine state of bondage. The Grace of God impels the soul of man to turn God-ward, and he is initiated as a votary of Truth. But the poet fears that without the proper discipline in this world of temptations, he might return to the state of ignorance again! In order to abide by the way of Truth, the poet admonishes his soul step by step to get rid of all impurities within and without. Only a purified soul will be an acceptable votary of the lord.

THE SIXTH ASCENT. DECAD 6.

The Experience of Incantation.

In the sixth step of his ascent up the mystic mount of love, the pilgrim-lover incessantly chants the praises of his Guru. He looks forward to the companionship of the saints of God and protects himself against the tremendous pull of attachments from the external world.

The lord is his dear master, his treasured love, his father, his protector and the poet pleads for His Grace to "lead him amidst encircling gloom."

Like a despised stray dog, he has been deluded by false delights, while the other consecrated saints have steadily marched on to the goal of undying Bliss. He prays for divine succour to Him who wields the victory over evil forces.

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Long, he has wandered like a sightless pig and so he supplicates to the Lord to vouchsafe His Grace, and nourish him with the milk of love and free him from the fetters of darkness, so that he too may join the company of the blessed.

There were saints who had performed severe penances for the purification of their minds and bodies and yet they did not attain the goal. Even though he was unworthy, the Lord bestowed upon him infinite grace and even after these acts of mercy, he was stony. He poses the question:

"If not on the wings of love, by what other means shall I soar to reach my Beloved Gem?" 5. 6. 54

"That happy band of pilgrim fathers have reached the goal, but I am held under the thralldom of the flesh." 5. 6. 55

His intuitional vision of the communion of these lover saints who adored Him with undying love fascinates him. He saw this beatific sight and yet was unmoved at his own exile! 5. 6. 56.

He dwells on the idea of poetic justice; he pays the price for his sinful life and weakness of the flesh, while those who sought His love in all that they did, enjoyed his bliss.

However it was a fact that the Lord had pity on him and had made him His; His own; Manivachakar was so elated at his unexpected elevation, that it caused laughter even to himself. That he should not crumble in His esteem and grace was his constant prayer. 5. 6. 58.

However, this mood changes, and the heaving of a thousand sighs is heard as he implores His Beloved Sire:

"Is it meet that Thou forsake me
Unworthy as I am, after enslaving me?
Who will be my Guide? Great Sire, what becomes of me?
Where shall I seek shelter? My father, Light Divine?"
5. 6. 59.

His plea for the shelter of 'Namasivaya' has been heard at last. The Ascent takes him in sight of the blessed com-

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pany of the saints, and unabashed, he joins in the joyous ecstasy of the august assembly.

CHAPTER XV

TIRUCHATAKAM

THE SEVENTH STAGE. DECAD 7.

A Plea for Divine Compassion

In this decad where the saint begs for divine grace, we hear the plaintive notes of a weary pilgrim. As he labours up the mystic mount, he has already bodied forth in imagination, his enjoyment of the company of the saintly pilgrims who shall welcome him at journey's End. In this section, he continues to sing in praise of the Lord and tunes his prayer for more and more of strengthening love.

The poet artistically portrays the inevitable obstacles which bar his way for a speedier ascent upwards. The barriers of existence, the limitations of the body, the spirit willing and the flesh being weak idea, play on the poet's feelings, that he wrings out a haunting cry in this decad, for "The Immediate Solace of His Love."

It is not satisfying to be a spectator of others' enjoyment, however gladsome such a sight is! Detachment to the world alone will not suffice. Attachment must actively spring in the core of the heart and the depth of the mind to the "Matchless, Supreme, Spotless one, the Mystic Dancer at Tillai. No longer can I continue to abide in this body, Oh Sankara, My felicity!" 5. 7. 61.

Adoration to the Lord both in his formless and manifested aspect, is an effective device adopted by our bard of Tillai to attain His feet. The whole Poem of Tiruvachakam is a poetic garland of adorable incantation to the Beloved Lord. That it is beneficial to attach oneself to the highest Love is conveyed by sage Tiruvalluvar:

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Attach yourself to Him who is without attachment;
That attachment will detach you from other attachments.

The Poet's plea for liberation is heard in the first half of each verse, while the incantation of praise is invoked in the latter part of each verse. The moods (bhavas) of victory and mercy (Karunai) commingle in these verses.

"Glory be to Thee, Namasivaya! Refuge have I none
but Thee."
5. 7. 62.

"Hail Him as Truth and Love, refreshing sweetness of mercy.
Hail That art manifested in all forms of the Universe;
Hail the ever fresh, surging clear waters of mercy."
5. 7. 63.

Suddenly, the lover becomes transported in an ecstatic joy which radiates his horizon and he sings the song of Rapture.

"No longer can I glorify Thee from a distance.
My steps falter in the climb of steep ascent.
Therefore do Thou come to me ever so soon,
Now and save me from this prison habitation,
By melting the bars of iron be thy alchemy of love."
5. 7. 64.

Associations of Puranic ideas, recalling the many compassionate exploits of Lord Siva with the matted locks and holding the Ganges to prevent a deluge, pass before his poetic vision. His poetry resounds the rhythm of joy, when he sings the glory of the Lord and resolves to strengthen his attachment; but ebbs when it paints harrowing pictures of himself forlorn and frustrated.

In the next few stanzas of the poem, the pendulum of emotion swings fast hither and thither, from hope and worship to desolation and denial.

"Myself I despise: Hail, Hail my Lord!
Thyself I'll not blame: Hail gracious feet laid on me!
To bear with wrongs is the noble nature of the wise, Hail!
Oh, Take my life, my Refuge Be! Lord of Heaven, my Lord.
5. 7. 66.

This lyric is an example of the rasa of 'Karunai' (mercy) and 'Sringara' (love) harmonising with the 'bhavas' of exul-

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tation, equanimity and courage. It reminds us of the joyous melody of the skylark, commingling with the plaintive strains of the nightingale, both of course singing the symphony of love.

In the following lyrics, the petals of praise are offered by the poet at the altar of the Beloved:

"Glory to Thee Supreme One, Peerless Father,
Glory to Thee!
Glory to Thee Light of Gods, Our tender shoot of
Love, Hail!
Bid me arise and come to Thee for Thy refuge, Hail.
And grant me Thy blessed feet — Thy refuge, Hail.
My forlorn self will not respire in loneliness then."
5. 7. 68.

Here is the bouquet of love of the poor in heart, begging for the balm of refuge at the feet of the great giver of succour! That out of His abundance, He will shower His Love on those that ask and those that knock incessantly, is expressed in the closing verses. The decad ends on magnifying the Supreme Lord who is the prime mover of life's drama.

Thus we see the sublime art of the Master Poet, lifting up the poetic spirit into the infinite. In Tirumular's Tirumantram, we are intrigued by the spell of the Temple Bell music and in Dante's Divine Comedy we enjoy the echo of the cathedral chimes, but in Manivachakar's poetic cadences which are more subtly woven, we hover on the verge of Eternity where Love meets Beauty in the vesture of Truth. The spirit of his poetry is also that of his life, a life of calm, meditative joy, attained by intense worship of the Highest, Fairest and the Best.

THE EIGHTH STEP. DECAD 8

The Unfolding of Bliss

"So near and yet so far".

The poet is on the eighth halt in the ascent. Step by step, he has reviewed the perils and pastures new of the spiritual expedition, from the time he came under the sway of his

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Guru. He met Him at Tiruperunturai. The seed of love sown at Tiruperunturai grew into a tender plant and withstood the sun, rain and wind and passed through the stages of growth, root, stalk and leaves, till it blossomed into a blushing bud, rich with the promise of love's fulfilment. This stage is described in this decad as the "Unfolding of Bliss."

The key to this poem is found in the last line of the previous decad: "Thou who cannot be communed by the efforts of the senses Five." The poet seeks to find the 'Open Sesame' that shall lead him to the realm of light. The key of the 'Senses five' even when purified in the fire of wisdom and moulded in entire dedication cannot open the door to the city of God — 'Siva Nagar'. Here stands the lover on the threshold, having come so far, by trampling objective barriers, but still preserving his identity in the body.

Then comes the intercession in the first stanza of this lyric. Love pleads at the doorway of the Beloved:

"Long, long have I trod,
Lone, all alone I've come;
Let in Thy kindly light,
And lead Thou me in."

The first stanza is difficult to translate as the seer in sight of the avenue of infinity, sings in the language of eternity! Hear his lisping strains:

"My Beauteous Sire! My own Master!
When Thou initiated me, Thou found me fit enough.
Thy gracious feet lured me and I heeded thy call.
Then it seemed that in this Body, I can ne'er be
In unison with thy Feet — And wherefore so?
This meeting, parting and yearning for union;
Naught else to do but seek the way of Love alone
That shall bind us in mystic union, Bliss most rare."

5. 8. 71.

In this stanza we only hear the mumbled heart-beats of his chastened love, as he knocks at the great doorway of his Beloved. The search-worn lover proceeds to dwell on the mystery of the transfiguration of his body into an image of Love divine, in inseparable union at his feet. Eyes streaming with tears, hands clasped, the impediments of the body

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sunk under, the poet weaves a heavenly spell of rapturous love.

"Though this body was compounded of deceit and falsehood,
Yet now, it knows no other attachment but Thine.
And my love made pure and holy
I've no other refuge but that of Thy Feet.
My Master and lord of Uma! May thy perfect Love
Vouchsafed to thy truest lovers rest on me too."

5. 8. 73.

The appeal for the great and holy love of God takes a redounding certainty. So forceful is the ultimatum that he pledges to seek this perfect love, even through countless births which he had despised and loathed before. 5. 8. 74. The gracious feet symbolise the incomprehensible grace of God which passeth all understanding.

"Pity a guileless child with none to protect save Thee."

5. 8. 77.

It was absurd to have sought Thee here and there, when Thou art every where; it was ignorance that saw Thee in differences and differentiated divisions. Only an iron heart could have withstood the irresistible flow of His love, which so overpowered the mystic lover that it bade him proclaim:

"What great wonder is it that there should be
Love (in me) to Thee and (in Thee) to me?"

5. 8. 80.

Analysis becomes difficult as the poet's mystic fervour soars on wingless poesy and flutters at the Great Heart of the majestic lover and beloved in One.

THE NINTH ASCENT. DECAD 9

The Rapture of Realisation

We see the poet on the ninth step of the Ascent. His question at the end of the last decad is answered in this lyric. "Why did I love Him? What was the secret of His Love to me?" The Beloved Guru showered His love on me at first. I was slow to respond and yet when He persisted, then I began to love Him. This is the Truth. All on whom His love nestled have endeared themselves by cords of truth-

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ful Love; and they have reached His feet. But I had my doubts about the truth of His love to me and my love to Him. And so I lagged behind till all my false beliefs and doubts were cleared.

This discipline was essential. The seed of love cannot thrive except in the garden of Truth. This being so, his master bade him tarry on earth and weed out the "non-true" plants. He was baffled by the scorn of the world and was subject to great humiliation. "Not able to endure their mockery, I turned from serving the world to serve Him, who held me in servitude."

The poet prays for the solace of a vision of his master. "When again can I see Thee face to face?" 5. 9. 83.

"It was all my undoing. That I should have found my Great Teacher and yet have loitered on earth in pursuit of transient joys, was a colossal blunder."

"Suppose I stumble and fall,
On what prop can I rise again to come to Thee?"
5. 9. 84.

Full of tranquillity, the poet moves the heart of the great lover and prays for forgiveness at his grumblings and littleness. 5. 9. 85.

The blessed saints had reached the city of God, whereas he and his shadow of Falsehood were left aside to roam on earth at large. The "I and mine" were his inseparable companions that dogged his footsteps. 5. 9. 85.

They overshadowed the Guru's teachings. Where he failed, the true devotees of Siva succeeded.

"These inheritors of peerless true love,
knowing none else, clinging to Thee alone for Grace,
Dedicating their lives in glorious service,
They attain Thee."
5. 9. 86.

He exhorts for this sublime love which shall lift him from the slough of despondancy. 5. 9. 87.

His estrangement from the goodly company of the saints is brought out in the simile of the blind cow. There is pathos invested in the sight of a blind cow who goes daily to graze

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with the herd, till one day she discovers that the other cows have left her alone and gone away. In vivid imagery, he describes the procession of saints, their faces uplifted with love, their hearts melting like wax in fire, as they move upward in adoration to the gleaming, golden feet of the Lord.

The Poet strikes an optimistic chord. There is yet hope for him if he persists in following steadfastly these saints of God. Hope that springs eternal in the human heart lifts Manivachakar from despair, and he closes this lyric on a testimony of man's profound faith in the wisdom of Eternal Bliss.

'False is the play of my heart and my mind too.
False alas, is my love that springs from it.
If I shed tear drops in weeping remorseful anguish,
Shall I not win thy compassionate grace?
Essence of sweetness, freshness, gladness mellifluous,
Dear Lord! perfect my love and draw me in Grace to Thee.
5. 9 90.

THE TENTH STEP. DECAD 10

On the Peak of the Mystic Mount of Love

The Ecstasy of Bliss

"Thy true lovers have attained Thee, Thou Truth of Truth".
5. 10 91.

Leaning absolutely on the adamantine chains of love, the poet is on the last stage of the ascent up the Mount of Love. The truest of true lovers of God have attained the bliss of truth. These men of God, pilgrim-lovers are no longer insubordinate subjects bound unwillingly by an overpowering master. They are neither hapless lovers nor helpless friends but are inheritors of love — the seekers in immediate sight of their incomparable Beloved.

"Thou changeless deluge of Love! As Guru Thou came —
Those that felt the impact offered their mite of Love —
And enjoyed the sanctity of unison in Love —
Saintly lovers all who attained thy Bliss of Truth.
From eternity, in lowly light of grace,
In mortal form thou came, and I too saw Thee.
But depraved still, hardened in my heart,

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I groped in the dark and nether realms."

5. 10. 91

Manivachakar knew the cause of his long separation from his Guru. He realised that the sooner he got rid of the body-barrier, the better for his spiritual experience. In the metaphor of light, he seeks to convey to us the bliss of the reward of love, and in this last decad, there are frequent references to 'Light' and 'Darkness' as well as to Truth and Unreality. "Tell me", he beseeches, "is it meet that Thou should'st leave me here, in falsehood thus to fall?" 5. 10. 92.

"Though *not* deemed fit for the bliss of Realisation,
Though cloaked in unreal vesture and egoistic vanities,
When Thou bad'st me come with loving glance
My afflictions ceased; yet deceit now seemed truth.
And yet I perished not, Oh blooming Lotus Foot!

5. 10. 93.

It is noteworthy that in this context, the poet places the loving companions of God, even before the divine Master.

"The tender nature of the Lord's love looks for no return,
For has He not turned a stony heart into a ripened fruit?
Therefore, wherever I turn, what'er I do, Thy protecting,
Never-failing love will be my best armour".

5. 10. 94.

Then we come to one of the finest gems in Tiruvachakam. Hidden in the realm of light on the Mystic mount of love, in the company of the radiant lovers, he sings his song of bliss exalted in the firmament of infinity:

"Unknown to the dwellers of the celestial regions,
Surpassing the comprehension of the Vedas,
Unseen by the sages and seers of earth art Thou!
Of thy own accord in benevolent love, Thou mad'st me Thine.
The Dance of life to thy rhythm moves on —
Thou fed me with honied bliss that my love be full.
The Dance of Bliss resounds to thy symphony.
Mystic are thy ways of love on earth.

5. 10. 95.

This poem contains the quintessence of the poet's life on earth and his experiences on the Ascent. At first it was the dance of material pleasures that kept him

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busy. After the meeting of the 'Parama Guru' came the dance of progressive awakening, waxing or waning in accordance with the partner's absence or presence. Our hearts register the thrills and sensations sweet, and the pangs and pricks of love-forlornness when the poet plays his love waltz. Lastly occurs the dance of bliss of a Siva-bhakta who along with the band of devotees joins in the performance of the mystic Dance with the Lord.

From this joyful height, the saintly bard views the relationship of the lord with the world at large. He moves the universe of matter as subtly as a tree grows up without a seed. In the same inexplicable manner, he preserves and dissolves it. Likewise His acts of gentle grace work quietly in the hearts of men. Even if the tree that a man nurtured so tenderly proved ultimately to be poisonous, he will not destroy it; so also the lord will not discard a man even if he proved unfaithful.

Praise, devotion limitless, surrender, helplessness and humility mingle in unison in the closing stanzas of this lyric, as the chords of love strike a majestic melody. His many-sided relationships with his Beloved are recalled in a state of rapture:

"My father! my Sweet One,
My joy, Blessedness of blest souls,
One among thy devotees, I yearn to taste
Thy ambrosial Bliss, Gracious One.
Glory Bright, My Helper,
Treasure to those in need;
Will thou forsake me in this world
And leave me to pine at thy separation,
My sovereign lord?"

5. 10. 98.

The lover has reached his goal. He beholds the 'beatific vision' and joyfully calls out to his Beloved to come and welcome him to the realm of bliss, so that he too may experience the bliss ineffable, and join in the Dance of Bliss with the blessed saints: in the visible presence of his 'Love'

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whom he had sought so long and so hard, the 'Cosmic Dancer', the soul of man performs a dance where the emotional experience of love and harmony commingle. There is calm after the storm, when at last the lover steps up the last step, and touches the feet of 'Siva'. The torrential river of 'Ananda' rushes past us.

"Let me sing a song of Praise to Thee —
A melody of soulful and melting love.
Let me dance a dance of praise to Thee
Before thy joyous form in Tillai's Hall.
Let me be one with Thee in holiness meet,
Freed from the burden of mortal coils.
Let me arise from dreams of fleeting joy
To seek Thy Bliss divine,
Thou Radiance of Truth."

5. 10. 100.

THE SACRED CENTO CLOSES

The bard of Vathavur conjures up the blissful state of a devotee, a lover of Siva, who had wrestled in the battle of life and won. There is the cognition of the True and the imparting of Divine knowledge. This is followed by a dying to the sense of self and the purification of the soul.

The purified soul has no way of expressing his gratitude to the Giver of Grace and therefore he raises a cry of "other refuge have I none." An overwhelming sense of the divine love fills him and he ponders on his ingratitude, infidelity and the deceptive nature of his love. In contrast to his plight, he sees the true lovers of Siva moving on to the city of 'Sivanagar'. Remorse, frustration and loneliness stunning, benumb his soul, and he pleads for the forbearing, compassionate love of his Beloved; "a contrite heart O lord, Thou will not despise". Then follow the stages of the vision of the mystic union of saints and his supplication for consummation. On the mount of love stands the pilgrim-lover and his insight into Truth, and discernment into the yoke of Non-Truth is conveyed in language that set dumb chords vibrating in a thousand hearts.

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CHAPTER XVI

NEETHAL VINNAPPAM: THE POET'S PRAYER
PLACE: UTTARA KOSA MANGAI
QUINTESSENCE: RENUNCIATION ABSOLUTE.

"My Gem! In ignorance Thy Grace I denied."

THE WAY

This hymn is a prayer. That every man aspires to enjoy the bliss of Siva and be for ever in the presence of His eternal light has been the theme so far. In this poem, the poet supplicates that His loving Grace should never forsake him; this time his path does not lead him up to the mystic mount of love, but to the way of renunciation and detached service.

In its primeval state, the soul of man though embedded in gloom was inseparable from His Divine Grace. When the soul has its first gleam of illumination by his Grace, then begins the pangs of separation from His Gracious feet. The soul after its active impact with the divine grace begins its process of cleansing and purification and searches for the way of reunion with the Gracious Feet. Love is one of the searchlights and the other is the discipline of detachment to the world. The prayer of the poet in this psalm is to reunite him to His loving gracious Feet and not to leave him alone in the world.

After his initiation, Manivachakar had wandered to the shrine of Uttara Kosa Mangai. He felt desolate at the separation of his Guru and His devotees at Tirupperunturai. In this psalm, he fortifies his mind by detachment to withstand the burrs of this world. In these fifty quatrains, the last word in each verse is repeated as the first word of the following verse and the repetition of the refrain, "Leave me not in loving grace," contributes to the unity of thought and expression.

LEAVE ME NOT

Fear and dejection are the dominant sentiments (bhavas) in this elegiac strain of poetry. "To extricate himself from

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the potent attachments to the world" is the burden of his stoic appeal. "Gone is his Guru. Gone too are His companions." He beseeches for reunion with His Gracious Feet in the first section of each verse ending "leave me not" and the still small voice of the Master is heard in reply to his fears, 'Why fear?' and the poet states his reasons in the last two lines of each of the fifty verses. Fear and despondency are due to the lack of detachment (Vairagya), and not the result of any separation from the Gracious Feet. Actually the 'seeming' separation is no separation to one who can view the world in a spirit of non-attachment.

The poet's magical power of expressing with the utmost poignancy man's spiritual weariness, his menacing perplexities and his immense difficulty to abandon the grip of the world, are conveyed with a precise and clear apprehension of the human soul and its ultimate destiny.

"To be free from frailty, ignorance and fear,
To be free from conflict which makes him suffer so much,
To be free from cares, loneliness, despondency, sensual attachment,

To be free from wrong judgment, indiscrimination,
To be free from infidelity and insincerity,
To be free from the temptations of the flesh to err;
To be free to sing and adore,
To serve the Master and his followers steadfastly,
To thirst after Him and hunger for His Love,
To be liberated from all taints of humanity
And so attain the Feet of Siva."

This is his prayer.

THE ESSENCE OF THE POEM

'In Grace, Thou initiated me. My Guru, leave me not in this sinful world'. 'Why Fear'? comes the hidden voice of the Guru. 'I am always with you and you are safe in this world'. Manivachakar's reply is, "I feel faint, wilt thou not support me?" 6. 1.

"My frailty for the charms
Of worldly enjoyments still persists.
Leave me not in loving Grace.

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My place is with Thee,
Free me from infidelity,
Oh lord of Uttara Kosai Mangai."

6. 2.

"Rooted in sensual delights, I stand
Like a tree thriving on the banks of a river.
Leave me not in this world of allurements,
In Grace, should Thou not succour me?"

6. 3.

"I dislike being caressed by the streams of worldly love,
Like the luxuriant trees fed by the river."

Thus he craves for the life-giving milk of 'Sakti' — the Grace of the lord. His skilful use of similes and allusions from the rich heritage of the Tamilian literature enrich the poetry of his prayer.

"Thou did'st hold me in thy hands and I slipped.
Apart from thy benignant grace, I thrive here.
Free me from ignorance, Thou who art the radiant light!"

6. 4.

"Like a moth in burning light
What an easy prey I fall to the beguiling charm of women!
Free me from all such impediments.
That I declined to be cherished by Thy Grace!"

6. 5.

"For denying Thy Grace, hate me not —
Free me from my ignorance, my Gem,
And from the taint of evil deeds;
Should not the Magnanimous One
Bear with the default of the poor ones?"

6. 6.

"Thou who initiated a victim of false values!
Why hidest now thy bliss, Healer of my evil ways?
Leave me not in falsehood without thy loving Grace."

6. 7.

"That my wrongs be righted by thy balmy Grace, I perspire.
Desire and fear wage a constant war within me.
Leave me not without Grace, in such conflict!"

6. 8.

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"Thy Feet in fullness filled my heart
But I swerved from thy sway and grew lean.
Leave me not without Grace."

6. 10.

"Behold the ant caught in between a burning brand.
Such bewilderment faces me.
Leave me not alone, that I waste my days in despair.
I pine, I gasp at this my perplexity.
Free me victorious warrior with the trident."

6. 9.

"Deceived by my foes, the senses five,
I feel so far away from thy Gracious Feet,
Leave me not to such affliction, Oh Thou who art
Without and within me, my light of Grace."

6. 11.

"I forsook Thee for the pleasures of the World.
Yet leave me not in sorrow for my disloyalty,
Great ocean of Grace that can quench my thirst."

6. 12.

"I know not how to quaff from Thy sea of Grace.
Like the dog that laps the muddy waters of the lake
And is still not quenched, so am I too.
Leave me not to thirst, Thou who art the flood of bliss."

6. 13.

As the saintly poet strings his weaknesses and frailties in the world, he finds to each imperfection of his, a stimulating panacea from the never failing compassionate Grace flowing from the Feet of God. If he finds himself thirsty for the fleeting delights, the divine Grace of the lord will quench his thirst by offering him milk from the Ocean of Grace. If he is distressed by hunger for worldly affections, the lord's grace shall appease his hunger with eternal love and happiness.

"I saw Thee with such rapturous delight
And yet did not pursue Thee doggedly.
Leave me not, father accessible and Guru mine."

6. 15.

"Thou flash of lightning! My flame of Truth!
When chilling fear possesses me with none to say

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'Fear not my child,' leave Thou me not, Thou who art
My father, my mother and my peerless pearl."
6. 16.

"Leave me not alone with those that spurn Thee.
Oh Grace, in perfect union with Thy true Saints!
Light of the devotees and darkness of the wicked!
Thou who art the sole refuge of my soul."
6. 17.

"Thus I rave — Be with me, govern, sell or pledge me.
An inexperienced guest am I in the house of the Lord.
My vow of absolute fidelity do Thou accept.
Leave me not, Healer of the ills of births."
6. 18.

"Thy fire of Grace burns up the dark woods of my sinful deeds.

Come as the warrior of old who killed 'Kayasuran' —
The elephant which frightened Uma. Free me
From the manacle of birth, and leave me not."
6. 19.

"Like a creeper trailing with no support, I wither away.
Leave me not to tremble so, Lord absolute and source of life!"
6. 20.

"My Father! Leave me not to feel distressed
Like the tender plant trampled by warring elephants.
Thou, who thrills my soul, with thy sweetness and light."
6. 21.

"Transcendent Lord! Friend of those who love Thee.
Leave me not alone."
6. 22.

"In this life, I did many a wrong and am a bankrupt in love.
Leave not this unworthy one, Life of Life, Oh Indwelling One.

Having gained peace from Thee, leave me not lest I perish."
6. 23.

"Under the sway of the senses
That shut out my approaches to Thee,

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As the ants that swarm round the ghee pot,
Leave me not lest I lose my power of discrimination."

6. 24.

"Mighty One, who never forsakes His loved ones!
Leave me not to be gnawed by attractions
Of the world, like the worm amidst ants."

6. 25.

"He who upheld the Ganges in his locks
And who saved the moon from waning
Out of his great mercy, will He not protect me?
When the waters ebb, the little fishes faint on the shore.
So bereft of Thee, I quake and faint."

6. 26.

"One is enthralled by the wiles of the Fair.
Will Thou not free me? Purify me,
Oh, My spotless pearl, who gave me
A place midst pious saints."

6. 27.

"I erred from the right path and was upset.
Shrine of my heart, leave me not alone,
Thou, who saved the Gods from trouble!"

6. 28.

"Churned like curdled milk,
I swing under the sway of the senses.
Leave me not to whirl in evil ways,
Oh, victorious Father mine."

6. 29.

"Tossed about in sensations' delights,
Perplexed sore, I thrive here.
Leave me not Essence pure."

6. 30.

"Thou, who pervadest every object, leave me not."

6. 31.

"I'm caught in the mesh of pleasures.
Except to thy truest saints
Thou, who art beyond discernment.
Leave me not."

6. 32.

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"My Own Father, fill me with the wine of Thy Grace.
Leave me not to rejoice in religious excess and conceit.
Consecrate me yet again to Thy humble service
And free me from wayward caprices."

6. 33.

"Satiated by selfish pleasures, I hasten to know Thy will.
When will Thou come and fill me with Thy sweetness,
Like unto the ripe juice of the plantain fruits?
Ah, leave me not."

6. 34.

"Thou who willeth that I be one with Thy dear saints,
Leave me not in desire and deceit,
For I dread the deadly poison of the senses five."

6. 35.

"I burn with sorrow in the hot bed of desires.
Leave me not
But come with Thy cooling, bracing grace."

6. 36.

"Like jutting rocks that butt,
My sinful deeds press upon me.
Leave me not comfortless."

6. 37.

"Unable to cross the woods where I get enamoured
Of carnal pleasures, leave me not in weakness,
Sole Refuge who transcends attachment,
Chase away my loneliness."

6. 38.

"When Thou art my supreme Helper,
Why do I seek the guide of false senses?
Leave me not to gloat in "Egoism."
Source of my Life! Strength of my Soul!
No more can I bear the pain of mortality."

6. 39.

"Leave me not to be ensnared in the net of lust.
Free me from the pangs of sensuality."

6. 40.

"Leave me not — my goal of bliss to be tortured
In the sea where crocodiles roam.

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Enough of this sickly prison of my body."

6. 41

"Leave me not to my fate in this birth,
Lead me through the way of wisdom to Thy Feet."

6. 42.

"No fitting return can I offer Thee,
If Thou wilt not leave me, Thou brightness of Joy.
Thou art the Alpha and Omega of Thy faithful saints."

6. 43.

"Dissolved in carnal fire, I melt,
Leave me not, though unworthy,
Join me to Thy saints. Thee will I sing."

6. 44.

"Leave me not — I cannot sing Thy praises.
This body, I do not abandon:
In wondrous love, I do not pant nor seek Thee;
Where has He gone? Who saw Him? I ask not.
I pine here in despair, listlessly."

6. 45.

The rest of the stanzas in this poem is in the form of "Nindastuti" where the poet addresses the Lord as a "mad man" and uses other contemptuous terms. It has been a favourite device among the great mystic poets, such as the Alvars. "Thou who tastes poison, clinging to a waning moon; an ordinary man art Thou, without great qualities! So will I revile Thee, lest you forsake me." The poet's mood changes from beseeching prayerful supplication to one of despairingly challenging attitude of aggression.

"When Thy service failed to give me joy, I reviled Thee;
I am sleepless with grief: Leave me not."

6. 47.

"I shall loudly trumpet my serfdom to Thee,
Let the world laugh at Thee for forsaking Thy faithful."

6. 48.

"I'll make them scorn Thee;
Disparage Thee at every turn.
Ho, Thou hast forsaken me;
And if Thou leave me, I shall abuse Thee sore."

6. 49.

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"Madman clad in elephant's skin,
Madman with hide for his garb,
Madman that ate the poison,
Madman of the burning ground fire,
Madman that chose even me for his own."

Of course, 'madman' He is, and all his followers become mad also, and are they not called so by the world? Professor Drummond in his address on the "Eccentricity of Religion", remarked that Christ suffered such indignity because the charge was that "He was beside himself." God and the world occupy different centres and those people who revolve in the world's centre call God and those in Him, eccentric or mad.

"Whether I adore Thee or revile Thee,
I crave Thy forgiveness for my evil deeds which I rue.
Leave me not, Oh Thou who took mercy on the Gods
And drank the poison in order to save Them.
How much more do I stand in need of Thy loving mercy?"
6. 50.

Thus Manikkavachakar interprets in his poetry humanity's groans and travails after their proper meanings.

THE POETRY OF EXPERIENCE

EPILOGUE: Tiruvachakam opens with the four hymns of adoration, forming a beauteous garland of praise to the Supreme Lord. Then follows this second section of the poem, "The Sublime Cento" and "The poet's Prayer", which should be taken as one unit of experience. The poet takes us quietly through the thorns of his experiences witnessing huge affliction, and fills us also with an undying thirst for "The true, the noble and the fair".

In these psalms, we have a true record of the mystic experiences of the pure saints of God — the stages of separation, purgation blind and union. We see herein the immeasurable heights of Manivachakar's enjoyment in the presence of the God-Guru, the arduous trials and obstacles that beset him in his upward ascent, the pangs of forlorn weariness and frustration, his supplication through varied forms of worship, service and contemplation, for favours

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and boons leading to the highest gift of His benign grace — His Gracious Feet; he dwells on the magnitude of the Lord's tender love and contrasts it with his mean waywardness and imperfections, subject as he is to the desires of the senses.

He recalls his persistent struggle through virtuous practices and deeds in search of wisdom, his baffling moments of beatific "Encounter" with the Guru, followed by serene mystic silence. The transcendental Reality reveals His immanence not only through His five-fold acts on earth, but also as a Guru taking His abiding place in man's heart, and consequently there is elimination of delusions and Ego-hood and man attains the summit of blessedness and peace. Such in short is the quintessence of "The Sublime Cento," and "The Poet's Prayer", wherein the Sage of Vathavur has embodied in distilled sweetness, his mystic longing for the highest consummation of divine Grace.

This Poem of Experience interprets the interrelationships of the three factors of Pati (Supreme God), Pasu (mortal man) and Pasam (the world). It depicts the play of the qualities (Gunas) and feelings (Rasas) of man, as he encounters the light of God, hedged as he is in the gloom of ignorance and subject to the effect of deeds good and ill and the delusions of the world. Man becomes significant when he is vouchsafed the vision of the Lord God almighty in His transcendental as well as in His immanent nature, as witnessed in His manifold manifestations on earth. But mankind generally cannot for ever keep on soaring to such sublime heights of illumination and joy. Man has to grapple with the burthen of existence which weighs him down. In the Poetry of Experience, there is also the picture of man absorbed in attachments, allurements and adventures of the senses five, when he becomes a prey to iniquitous suffering of continuous births as a result of his ignorance, deeds and deceptions of his mind, and when he finds himself further removed from the light of God.

The vision of the God-Guru kindles in Manivachakar, an intense love and joy and the remembrance of it urges him to share his unspeakable happiness with not only the chosen ones of God, but also with those who have not yet been initiated into the mysteries of mystic experiences. It is

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in this unique context that we should understand the crescendo of his soul-elevating rapture at one time, with the rumblings of lamentation and sorrow at another time. The frailties of the mortal coils of the Saint, the very limitations of his body whirling through a cycle of births and deaths, impose on him an unendurable bondage and a stifling oppression at his helplessness in not advancing nearer and nearer to the balm of His sacred Feet. The weaknesses of the flesh loom in the background just as significantly as the coming of the God-Guru into his life, and this dual role of man gives poignancy to his drama of life on earth. Man's humanity is indeed a barrier, in his quest for consummation with the supreme Reality; and Tiruchatakam's emphasis on this aspect of the struggling man gives this most human of the Psalms, its natural claim to immortality.

In every canto of these two lyrics of supplication, we see this dramatic, masterly blending of the undying quest for the infinite with the struggle to conquer the weakness of the body; we witness the juxtaposition of light and darkness, beautiful and ugly, eternal and fleeting, truth and falsehood, joy and sorrow, peaceful and discordant, active and passive elements, communion and separation and presence and absence — enacted with a magnificent pageantry in the world outside, as well as within the heart of man; and pervading all is the life of life, the Lord God who is immanent and yet who transcends all these — the Word without beginning and end.

When the Guru and his followers left him, the poet might have sung these two psalms. He realised that the lonely journey to God was trackless; but so was the bird's; he comes up the mount of grace with the faith that God will guide him as he guides the birds of the air. Manikkavachakar is neither "Paracelsus who represents the intellectual alone, nor Aprile who embodies the aesthetic in life, but unites the two dissevered halves." These psalms convey the revelation of God in His manifest and unmanifested form to man, God's masterpiece. In "His will lies man's perfection", is the eternal refrain sung by mystics as Augustine and Dante

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and the Hindu mystics and men of God, like St. Manivachakar, Appar and the Alwars.

In "Tiruchatakam" and the "Prayer — Leave me not", we see a conjuration apt and marvellous of something we have all felt and lived through. The vision evoked is so puissant that it can darken all the air about us with sombre memory. How longingly does the poet sing of his love for the Infinite and of his dissatisfaction with the Finite. Browning's "Last Ride Together", depicts the lover riding with the finite and feeling an oppressive burden. So it has ever been — the finite, the sense given, the phenomenal, the mass of sensations pass away. To apprehend the truths underlying "Tiruchatakam" and "Leave me not — Prayer", we must join heart and soul with the poet's desire for the illimitable, infinite and eternal, with which each stanza is saturated.

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THE TESTAMENT OF BEAUTY

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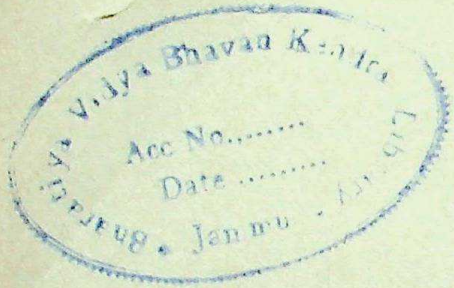

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CHAPTER XVII

THE TESTAMENT OF BEAUTY

TIRUEMPAVAI (ODE 7) TO TIRUTHASANGAM (ODE 19)

Introduction

The Poet relates his impressions on the road to Tillai through the devices of children's games and recreations. by adopting folk song lore, folk games and sending messages through the bee, kuyil and the parrot. Having sung 'The Poet's Prayer,' he awaits the answer of the Lord. The reaction to his cry of "Leave me not," is conveyed in these happy songs where the Lord unfolds the truth of His nearness to His devotees and His presence in the world where cares abound. He is in the world and in the soul of man mingling in the thoughts of man and movements of nature. As the Poet journeys from place to place witnessing the 'Leela' — the Dance of Siva in all its manifold aspects — he finds this world neither a blot nor blank; it is indeed an endearing world to live and let live, to love and be loved.

After Manivachakar had tasted the wondrous love of God and learnt the value of detachment, he views the world as a fine training ground to work for the good of all mankind and enjoy lasting contentment. The Lord bade him at the time of his initiation to remain on earth and find his way to Tillai, His abode of bliss. Though the master's order "Tarry here yet awhile" seemed a cruel exile at first, the poet came to understand that his mission in life was to sing the glory of the Lord. So we see the bard here on the road to Tillai. On the wayside and highways of his pilgrimage, he sees the people busily engaged in the game of life. He halts and sings these lyrics that they may hear and follow the royal road to God through work and worship. He directs the attention of all the wayfarers who listen to his songs to dedicate their work and pray to God. "Do your work as unto the Lord and sing His praises continuously. Come all

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ye who are lonely, all ye who are sad and over wrought, come let us sing, praises to our Lord—Om Sivayanama."

Manikkavachakar's illimitable love inspires every sentient being with enthusiastic faith in God. He invokes the bee, the parrot, and the young maidens to join with him and sing in praise of the Grace of Siva. He apprehends all activities of the children playing on the swing or pounding the gold dust in the light of the "visionary power." His songs are a prophetic call to all of us who forget the purpose of life, as we hurry through the fevered dale of life. We hear his sweet songs of hope, his songs of eternal bliss and imbibe the secret of happiness by retracing our steps from the thorny path of material existence to the kingdom of Siva. Each lyric is a happy song of release, release from the cares of the world, its pain, and delusions and is the song of the soul in advaitic union with the Lord.

In these thirteen lyrics noted for their poetic excellence, the poet pays the greatest attention to the feeling side of man. The wandering minstrel conveys in these poems, experiences through sense of something beyond sense. He communicates the great joy of a man who is in tune with the infinite. The fundamental quality of poetic style in these odes is its ease, smoothness and even flow as of gliding water. The modulations of the verse, changes of melody and rhythm are infinitely various. The words are made into a continuous texture, revealing their concealed energies and delicate suggestions. The continuous sound of language is its rhythm; the rhythm of language can symbolise as nothing else can, the emotional comment with which mind accompanies its experience. The Language in this Testament of Beauty is a transmission of energy rather than of substance. It is a stimulus for our minds; the whole purpose of the poet's technique is to make a moment of his experience come to life in other minds than his.

A stanza from the Ode to the Humming Bee may be quoted in illustration:—

> "Oh humming bee! don't ever more seek blossoms,
> Which yield but an iota of honey.
> Draw nigh to the feet of the mystic Dancer;

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A thought, a sight or speech of Him begets on us
Honied sweetness that melts in bliss our very bones."

10. 3.

In this section of lyrical poetry, the diction is characterised by vivid imagery and lucidity. To take another example.

"The unfading Gem of all aeons has unfettered me
From the clutches of the "fleshy nook".
Shall we not dance 'Tellenum' in joyous glee?"

Some of the happiest and finest examples of pure poesy are found in these lyrics and they are generally the most well known poems in Tiruvachakam — Tiruchalal, Tiru Ammanai, Tiru Kothumbi, Tiru Tellenam, and Ode to Kuyil. The beauty of this group of poems lies not in the moral virtues but in an inspiration on the unique value of Love, which is the substance of his soul. Whatever in the world has any worth is an expression of Love. In the melodious address to the birds and bees, in the songs of the innocent children in their play, the poet has chosen to express the beauty of man's eternal Love to the Lord.

TIRU EMPAVAI: THE DAWN SONG OF THE DAMSELS

PLACE: TIRUVANNAMALAI

QUINTESSENCE: IN WONDROUS PRAISE OF SAKTI

The Hymn opens with some young maids calling out to their friends inside the house, to join them in a procession to sing in praise of the Lord, who is without beginning and end, and who is the source of effulgent light. It is appropriate that in this lyric, the Lord should be extolled as a resplendent light (Paranjothi) as it is composed in Tiruvannamalai, where the manifested form of Siva is Light, symbolic (Agni) of the light that purges one of all darkness.

The damsels who wake up before dawn form into a choir, and wind their way to the houses of their friends arguing with those who are not ready, that there should be no spiritual lethargy among the faithful companions of the Lord. The procession of girls moves on and at another door, they playfully mock at a certain friend who usually spoke so eloquently of her Lord and yet who was late in opening

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the door to join them. The maiden inside retorts that she is only a young novice and that older devotees should not take amiss her weakness (7. 3.) to which they reply, "Will not those pure of heart sing of our Lord?"

When the girl inside wanted to know whether all the other companions had joined them, the maids outside bade her come and do the counting herself as they were too engrossed in praising the Lord who was dear to them, (7. 4.) who though unfathomable even to the Devas has made Himself nearer to them in Grace and Love. The young maidens from outside remind their friend of her promise to awaken very early in order to awake them. It is strange that she should be so indifferent to join their choir, even though they have come to her dwelling-place so early in the morning. It was incredible to see one so sensitive in her love to the Lord unmoved, even when she heard them adoring Him in the most endearing terms. Then follows a happy picture of the dawn when the exulting songs of birds and cocks are heard and conch shells sound in the temples, as if it were radiating the light of God's grace everywhere.

We hear the happy innocent voices of children singing a moving paean of love. They imagine themselves as the spouses of the Lord's lovers, and pray to Him who is both the wisdom of the ages and the wonder of recent revelations to grant them this boon. The next stanza is an address to the temple vestals to tell them all about their beloved. 'His place? His name? His kith and kin who?' 7. 10.

Then follows the stanza where the maidens dip into the pond singing and sporting gaily in the fullness of their love. While disporting thus, they raise their voice of praise to adore the Lord who sports in Tillai's Hall, and who grants to earth-born mortals, His grace on earth. They pray to Him to grant them bliss everlasting.

Then we have a fine allegory. The floating lily and the lotus flowers that they see while bathing in the pond appear to them as their Lord and Sakti. The trailing bands of swans are like the garland round Siva's neck; the conch shell is the bracelet adorning the arms of Sakti; and the vibrant music is the serpent twining round the Lord; those who dip

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in to bathe are the devotees who enjoy the grace of the Lord, who are cleansed of the 'three-fold malas'. (7. 13.) Thus they imagine as they joyfully plunge inside the lake. Their joy breaks into a jubilant dance of Sakti whose glory they sing.

'Sing ye the feet of Her who armlet wears,
Who cherishes us as Her children!

7. 14.

Next, we see the lovelorn state of a maid who out of the fullness of her love, has given her life wholly and entirely to Him. Her companions are amused. Who is this peerless, wise One who can conquer her thus? 7. 15. This stanza might refer to the poet himself. So great was his yearning that those who looked on him wanted to know the author, who was responsible for such rapturous love. This passage reminds us strongly of a fine stanza in Tiruvaimoli 7. 2: where the mother paints the picture of her daughter who has given her heart to the Lord of Tiruvarangam.

The poet resorts to an allegory of the cloud to explain the function of Grace (Sakti); like the cumulus cloud that draws its water from the sea and condenses in showers of rain, amidst thunder and lightning, so also the Sakti (Grace) arises with lightning flashes of her beauty and the sound of her cymbals is like thunder; the rainbow reminds us of her eyebrows; she is gracious to those who love the Lord whose side she never quits, and sends showers of grace to them. 7. 16. The young girls wrapt in the overpowering emotion imagine that even the Gods do not enjoy such bliss as they do, when they sing of their beloved who had cared for them and made their hearts his abode and granted them His Grace! The Lord is frequently referred as "Jyothi" or brilliance. "The stars pale; Darkness recedes at the approach of the Sun of Glory." 7. 18.

In beauty of thought and expression, stanza 7. 19. is considered a gem in Tiruvachakam. It is the prayer of love. The damsels vow to serve none but the true devotees of the Lord.

"Thou art the only refuge of Thy own children....

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Grant us the boon of serving Thy devotees only,
Loving them and seeing joy in nought else.

The poet adopts the technique of "Ahatturai", the form of Love poetry in this Lyric. The last stanza ends on a melody of praise. In complete self-surrender, these young damsels contemplate on the supreme Lord's transcendent form and on His loving grace, surpassing human understanding.

INTERPRETATION OF TIRU EMPAVAI

The poet uses symbols and practices prevalent in his time to convey his thoughts and feelings on one of the most entrancing manifestations of the Lord's Grace. He reveals in this lyric, the profundity of his great vision. Like Blake, he had to speak the meaning of eternity in the language of time, consistent with the religious practices of his day.

Many are the mystical interpretations given of this poem. That it is a lyric in praise of Sakti, is clear from the intent of the maidens' songs. Without the mediation of grace, God can never enter into any direct or personal relationship with the universe. In India, the month of December signifies the awakening of the Universe from its slumber of involution and marks the dawn of a new phase in the process of evolution. The Siddhanta theory is that it is through Sakti, the counterpart of Siva, His Grace, that the Supreme evolves all things and life fulfils its destiny. Generally this hymn is taken as an impassioned call to the maidens who symbolise the human soul, slumbering in a stupor of darkness, to rise before dawn in December which marks the beginning of activity in nature, that they may bathe in the refreshing waters of life and be cleansed from the impurity of ignorance.

Vidwan Sabapathy Mudaliyar in his edition of Tiruvachakam in 1871 and Srila Sri Siva Arunagiri Mudaliyar in his edition of Tiruvachakam and Tirukkovai in 1927, stress the idea of the operations of the nine Saktis, in their interpretation of Tiru Empavai. Each Sakti causes the other to move, and the Nava Saktis — Ambikai, Kanagambikai, Gowri, Ganga, Uma, Parasakti, Adi Sakti, Gnanasakti and Kriyasakti — are the principles of evolution. They move in the Suddha Maya and one by one, they cause the various parts of the universe to move by the action of their Grace on

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them. This is no doubt an ingenious interpretation in line with the philosophic import of Saiva Siddhanta, but much of the spontaneous poetry gets overwrought under the weight of this philosophical approach.

We can approach this lyric only as an example of pure poetry. Nestled on all sides by towering hills and quiet dales, Tiruvannamalai's exhilarating air invigorates the young children particularly, and it is no wonder that both the cantos sung in this sanctuary noted for its music resounding from its rocky hills, should breathe the bewitching vigour and exuberance of young children at play. The poet was on his long and arduous pilgrimage to Tillai. Passing Tiruvannamalai in the month of December, he must have heard and seen the children going from house to house singing, and wending their way to take a bath in the tank. Said Blake:

> When the voices of children are heard on the green,
> And laughing is heard on the hill;
> My heart is at rest within my breast,
> And everything else is still.

This poem unfolds the longing of the poet to enjoy the bliss divine along with the saints of God. Those maidens who stand outside, singing the glory of the Lord in strains of unpremeditated spontaneity are the holy saints of the Lord and the poet is the maid inside. They call on the devotee to join their band: "We are the loved ones of the Lord." Then they chide their friend, that one who was so exultant in the adoration of the Lord and who had expressed such great love in the sweetest terms, should now be so docile. This may refer to the poet's gift of sweet utterance as testified in Tiruvachakam. We can almost hear the languid sighs of the poet as he speaks through the lips of the young maid from inside, and tells his friends that he is still a novice, whereas they are His most faithful saints. The poet had bewailed many a time that he was left behind because of his immaturity, whereas all the other devotees had followed the God-Guru.

Manivachakar fondly imagines that his loneliness would be dispelled if he joins the band of saints. He awaits their coming on the injunction of the Lord. This lyric is a salutation

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to the principle of Fatherhood and Motherhood as Siva-Sakti, and the poet revives his happy memories of Tirupperunturai days, when he and the saints of the Master-Guru sported in adoration of the Lord in the manifested form of Ammai-Appan (Siva-Sakti). In the first nine stanzas, the poet addresses his inner self in appropriate forms, in accordance with his spiritual progress. In this reminiscential mood, we find him making a number of references to his early experiences; as for instance in stanza 9 the devotees speak of his exalted state of love which may allude to the days following his initiation at Tirupperunturai.

This was in sharp contrast with his present state of spiritual stupor. After the Poet's Prayer, we share with Manivachakar in his slumber of weariness. At this stage, the favoured sons of God go to his door and recall all the fine promises he had made, and revive his supersensitive sensations of overwhelming love for his Master, and of his pledge to sing of Him and Him only. They succeed in awakening him out of his stupor and finally, they all join in a tuneful procession to the tank where they purify themselves in the waters of Grace, and offer their salutations to God.

TIRU EMPAVAI AND ANDAL'S TIRUPPAVAI

Andal was the adopted daughter of Sri Periyalvar, the poet of Srivilliputtur, who was a contemporary of Nedumaran of the seventh century, the well-known Pandian King of the age of St. Sambandar. Andal was also known by the name of Sudik Kodutta Nachyar. Her well-known composition "Tirup Pavai", and our poet's "Tiru Empavai" bear close resemblances.

Both the poems are written in the same metre "Kocchagak Kalippa" (vide Tolkappiam 154). Both call on the maidens to rise before dawn in the month of December which marks the beginning of activity in nature, that they may bathe in the cool pond where flows the clear waters of life and grace. In order to appreciate the close similarity of the two poems, we shall attempt to give a brief resume of St. Andal's Tiruppavai.

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In the month of December, the maids arise to go for an early morning bath in the Jumna. "Let us perform a vow to Lord Sri Krishna and win His love and grace and enjoy His bliss. What should we do when we observe a vow to him? We shall sing His praises, meditate on his name, for He is our refuge. Let us perform devotional service and widen the knowledge of our dependence on Him" (stanzas 3-9).

Pastoral landscapes convey to the Gopis, the idyllic charms of their Lord. Thus they sing, uniting all true devotees and perform their special vow to a successful fruition. They approach the palace of Nanda Gopa and request the door-keeper to let them in. They address Sri Lakshmi to teach them part of her intense love and wisdom to understand the Lord. They beseech Sri Krishna to rise up and welcome them. They recollect instances of the Lord granting favours to those devotees, who prayed for His refuge.

In stanza 29, the climax of the appeal is reached when these votaries sing thus: "We come to Thee to accept ourselves and our life-long service. We shall cling to Thee for ever in the births to come and continue our devotional service in the form of singing glory to Thee. Separation from Thee is impossible". They prostrate before Lord Krishna. They obtain the boon of eternal companionship with Him in the due performance of their devotional service, although it appeared they approach Sri Krishna with a request to favour them with a Muraja instrument as a token of His Grace and reward.

Let us cite a few points of comparison from both the poems. Tiru Empavai and Tiruppavai are both sung by young maidens in the month of December and have the same refrain at the end of each verse. They are both supposed to be sung in the early hours of the dawn and are suggestive of hope and gladness. In both the lyrics, the maidens who form the procession outside rebuke the maid inside for her indifference and addiction to sleep. There is a magnetic call to arise, awake and join the happy band of the loved ones of God. Blithesome morn is ushered by the melodies of conch shells, crowing of the cocks, and

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music of the birds of the air. In the fervour of extolling the splendour of their Beloved, in the sincerity of conception and spontaneity of expression and above all, in the beauty of poetic diction and depth of philosophic purport, both these lyrics make a powerful appeal.

Yet with all the seeming similarity in form, diction and feeling, there is the vital difference between the two methods of approach. Tiruppavai is said to contain the essence of Upanishads which speak of those buried in the cycle of samsara, as being awakened by the Lord by His vision such as was given to the Alvars, with this one difference that in the case of Andal, she herself approached and awakened the Lord to listen to her grievances in these thirty stanzas. The keynote of Visishtadvaita Philosophy as expounded by Sri Ramanujacharya and the Alvars is struck by St. Andal in Tiruppavai.

In Tiru Empavai, Manikkavachakar floats in the lake of grace relishing with exceeding joy the company of God's loved devotees (stanzas 11-18). Siva Gnana Botham, Sutra XII echoes the same sentiments. "Let the Jivatma after washing off its mala which separates it from the 'Lotus Feet of the Lord', mix in the society of the Bhaktas, whose souls abound with love and who look upon their forms as His Form".

Finally, Manikkavachakar extols both the transcendence and the immanence of the Lord, followed by salutations to Him who presides over the five-fold acts of creation, preservation, dissolution, involution and grace.

"Thou that art without beginning and end —
Hail to thy Roseate Feet;
Thou Immanent One! Hail to thy Golden Feet,
The source of life, Hail to thy Flowery Feet,
The joy of life — Hail to thy twain feet,
Hail to the beauteous lotus that cannot be seen,
Thy golden grace that made us Thine, Hail, Hail."

7. 20.

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CHAPTER XVIII

TIRU AMMANAI. 8.

PLACE: TIRUVANNAMALAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE ECSTASY OF ANANDA

Manivachakar has been viewing the world as a stage of God where the continuous processes of creation, preservation, dissolution, involution and grace are carried on. In Tiru Empavai, he is filled with wonder at the working of this marvellous force of Grace, both in the external universe and in the hearts of men, particularly in the souls of those ordained by the light of the Guru. In Tiru Ammanai, the poet has composed an ode which the young girls can sing while playing their favourite ball game, and the poem is full of bubbling joy as it dwells on the glory of God.

The saintly Vathavurar dwells here in gratitude most profound, on the working of the Grace of God in his heart, and through the lips of children, he reflects the joyful experience of his life at Tirupperunturai when the Guru revealed himself to him. The refrain of the canto is "Sing ye and play the ball game". The song is one of linked sweetness on the majesty of the Lord who is transcendent, unknown even to the understanding of the Gods, Brahma and Vishnu who preside over creation and preservation of the universe. Though He is without name and form, beyond the comprehension of created objects including the heavenly devas, yet the wonder of wonder is that He is also accessible in manifested form to all true devotees. 8.2. He revealed Himself to me, enslaved me and vouchsafed the highest freedom ever realised by man. "Sing Ye my little ones and play the ball game".

The essence of this poem lies in its incommunicable yet bubbling feeling of ineffable joy. This is an example of poesy subordinating matter to the inspiration of feeling. The poet's inner experience is lit up with a halo of lighted joy that we seem to hear the joyful tinkle of the cymbals of the children who sing and play the game; so ingeniously has the Songster

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woven the harmony of sound and feeling into each of the stanzas. The Guru's appearance, initiation and his own dedication have a ring of sincerity and this form of poetry fits in well with his mood of communicating the joy he experienced with the others; who can be better than the young children in whose lips, the song breathes innocence and buoyancy?

Manivachakar alludes to the puranic references, where the Lord helps an old woman at Madura in the guise of a labourer by carrying the sand to dam the Vaikai bank, and he recalls the incident of his chastisement by the Pandya King. His magnanimity to Daksha is also brought out to elucidate the compassionate aspect of Godhead. The Lord reveals His Love to man by numerous acts of Grace which are clearly explained in the puranas. "Leaving aside the great devas, He came down to earth as a sage and called me; freed me from the misery of life and made me wise. The lowly One filled my heart with love, entered (8. 2.) therein as essence of sweetness and taught me the way of Truth".

He came down to earth (8. 3.), His body gleaming with holy ash and thrilled my heart with joy untold. Of his own accord, He came in human form (8. 4.) and enriched my stony self with the tender love of a mother. I tasted sensations queer and inward happiness when the essence of love, wisdom and joy appeared in the horizon of my heart. His Grace transformed my hard nature; it was like transmuting a stone by filling it with the juice of a ripe fruit (8. 5.).

The poet on the summit of his experience recounts the nature of His initiation in 8. 6.

> "He instructed me in things unknown.
> He made visible things unseen before.
> He revealed Himself to me as Light and Truth.
> Granted me the honey of His Grace;
> And while the world mocked at me,
> He attuned my whole being to His Music".

The Beloved, the Great Mother, the One who moves the seven worlds subjugated me at Tirupperunturai (8. 7). "He showed me His Gracious Feet, and so sing ye Ammanai".

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Denying his vision to Brahma and Vishnu, He overpowered me in this life, and saved me from future births.

"He who is in all things, He is the goal of life;
He points the way to bliss.
Sing ye dear children and play Ammanai".

8. 12.

Finally, the seer traces his own spiritual evolution. He contrasts his world-weariness with the essence, light and joy that he experienced when he encountered his Guru. He received him into His devotional service, melting his soul, trampling on his sins, and showing him the way of Truth. Then he recalls the depth of his bliss, and in this mood of rapture, Manivachakar imagines how at a second meeting with his Guru, he would perform such holy acts of love.

"I will garland and embrace Him;
In sweet rapture, I will take Him,
Clasp Him, shrink from Him, seek Him again,
Think of Him alone and pine for Him alone.
Then will blossom His love in me and for me—
He who dances with the flame....."

8. 17.

In the three closing stanzas, the symbolism of light, ambrosia and bliss conveys the intangible blessedness of rapture and they live in our memory by their accents of high beauty. The freed soul of man rejoices with the spontaneity and gaiety of the children at play. He sings of the Lord in endearing terms, for has He not severed his sorrows and attachments and bound him with silken cords of love that he may enjoy everlasting bliss? "Sing children dear on our Sweet Beloved and play Ammanai, the ball game".

TIRU POTCHUNNAM: 9. THE HOLY GOLD DUST
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: IN TUNE WITH THE INFINITE

In this poem, the women who pound the frankincense in the temple courtyard are represented as singing twenty

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stanzas. The saints, devas and the deities are invited to join in the pounding of the gold dust which shall be offered to the Lord who dances with Sakti by His side, to the Lord of Kanchi who can free them from the bondage of attachment. We witness the joy of the poet in the company of these folks who are actively engaged in the worship of the Lord. The world appears to Manivachakar as one vast mortar and each devotee holds the pestle and pounds the gold dust.

The rhythmic movements of the body as the women pound the dust are personified in beautiful allegorical forms. The pestle of mount Meru symbolising strong faith, pounds the saffron of Truth in the Earth's mortar. 9. 9. The mind dances to the tune of Siva, the eyes of the devotees dance with the tears of love, and Grace (Sakti) and Siva dance in sweet harmony, while births that bind themselves to unsaved souls also dance. Here is an excellent imagery which depicts the world of man and nature responding to the cosmic Dance of Sri Nataraj — 9. 10.

> "He is the source of the Vedas and the sacrifice,
> True to the truthful and veiled to the false.
> He is Light and joy to the Enlightened.
> Sorrowful and fettered to those in bondage.
> The first and Last — Sing and pound the holy dust of Gold".
>
> 9. 20.

The saintly lover moves on from shrine to shrine viewing the world objectively, seeing in the ordinary lives of the people the imprint of divine Grace, and interpreting their homely actions as outlets to pay homage and praise to the Great Lord. In the lyric on "The Poet's Prayer," he viewed the world as a theatre of loneliness, a cruel desert that separates him from his Lord. In these odes, he finds peace and happiness in the sacred shrines that he visits and his message to the world is significant:

> "Whatever work ye do,
> Do it unto the Lord, and sing ye His Praises".

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TIRUKOTHUMBI: 10. YE HUMMING BEES!

PLACE: TILLAI

QUINTESSENCE: IN PERFECT PEACE WITH THE LORD

The Bee represents the human soul and Manivachakar calls upon it to seek the Feet of the Lord in order to enjoy tranquil happiness. Like the bee, the soul should not feel content to drink honey from evanescent sources except from the source of the fragrant feet of God 10. 3. In the third line of each stanza, the soul's message is relayed through the bee to the divine Master. "Ye humming bees, go and sing mellifluously". This song conveys the positive happiness of the Siva-bhaktas (devotees) who have attained realisation at the Feet of the Lord.

In this ode, the author unfolds many a challenging question. "What is Wisdom? Who knows me? Who am I?" After his consecration, he feels differently like a new born being. Christ's injunction of "Ye must be born again", reminds us of the change that comes over the souls that have attained the joy of realisation. Such realised people in communicating their joy to the world, also desire that others should partake of their felicity. Therefore they dwell on the obstacles that bar the way to supreme love. They do not preach or moralise but speak of these in the first person as part of their own struggles, so that we too may gain courage and follow the path they have trod.

Man must not be content with fleeting delights but should seek his lasting joy at the feet of the Lord, whose grace is unfailing. The poet alludes to St. Kannappar as the highest embodiment of a Bhakta's love 10. 4; he himself was not so devoted like Kannappar, yet the Lord granted him incomparable Grace and in order to perfect his love has kept him on earth and called him to Tillai. That he is reconciled to this separation from the Lord is clear in this poem which deals with the joy that follows, when man understands and conforms to the purpose of the Lord's will.

In a world that worships false ideals, midst the confused strifes of diverse desires, one fact is clear. The Lord protects

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his faithful devotees and elevates them to His Peace. Having taken refuge at His feet, the poet's sorrows flee at the touch of His overflowing grace. 10. 9.

"The Lord melts iron hearts
Not by forceful means
But by Love and compassion".

10. 11.

Manikkavachakar's grand role after his conversion was that of a songster to the Lord. 10. 12. The Guru had directed his life with the tender love of a mother. Every one knew of the Guru's gracious revelation to him, though none knew except the Master and himself, of his own feeble love to Him. The poet can hide his sloth and lack of love from the world, but not from his Guru. The master cannot but know the truth of his feigned love for Him, because He dwells eternally in our hearts.

"Thou and I alone can gauge the weakness,
Nay, the languor of my faint Love for Thee".

10. 13.

Humanity down the ages has asked the self-same baffling questions that the poet puts forward in this poem:

"At what distance would myself and my soul be from our Beloved,

If He and His Grace had not guided us both, Oh my Soul".

10. 15.

Tagore asked a similar question in The Gardener: "How far art Thou hidden in my heart, O fruit?" The feeling and thinking man can only attempt to answer this question truthfully by acknowledging his inability to gauge the exact distance that separates him from the Master. All exactness is a fake. The poet realises that but for His grace, he would still be enslaved by transient pleasures. He derives great joy in the contemplation of the Lord's love. Without despising him for his fickle-mindedness, his Guru, the generous lover that he is, took up His abode in his heart and illumined it so brilliantly that one by one, his sorrows vanished.

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"He disdained me not as a thief, a knave, a liar.
My benevolent master little by little encompassed my heart.
My deepest scars and sorrows of life, he wiped out completely.

He endowed me with the light of Grace. Praise Him Ye Humming Bees".
10. 19.

Thus the light of Love lifted him and he felt like a dog being elevated to a dais, to the peace, perfect peace of the gleaming Lord 10. 20. The sentiment (rasa) of 'Santhi' is the reward of those who seek the Lord.

TIRU TELLENAM: 11. THE TELLENAM DANCE
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: IN UNION WITH SIVA

In this canto, St. Manivachakar is seen in an extremely jubilant mood as he tells the whole world of his blessed experience, through the songs of the children as they dance and play "Tellenum". It is a game where the sand is sifted in rhythmic steps. Happiness can best be relayed through the lips of children at play. The poet's mission is to sing. Tagore in his Gitanjali echoes these sentiments when he says, "It is only as a singer I can come to Thee, O Lord". Our poet tells the children at play:

"Children dear, listen —
He came to me as a brahmin sage that I may know Him —
He who is without name and form; the transcendent One.
Shall we not sing a thousand hallelujahs to Him,
And dance and play Tellenum".
11. 1.

In the service of the Master, Manivachakar found inexhaustible delight. What an astounding change it was, when his egoism vanished and he became a steadfast devotee of the Master! The vividness of his experience as he sighted his

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Guru is charged with sincerity, clarity and sublimity. The sublime is apprehended as the Infinite and the imagery is only an expression of it. The greatness of his master is not only immeasurable but it is always unmeasured. The sublime has been said to awaken in us the consciousness of our own infinity, and astonishment, rapture, awe, and even self-abasement are among the emotions evoked by sublimity.

This is how the poet described his experience at Tirupperunturai:

> "It was a motionless dance — indeed it was so:
> My words faltering, my mind quivering,
> My tears trembling at the brink of my eyes,
> I beheld Him and His Grace came to me
> On earth — Oh Thou snake charmer!".
>
> 11. 6.

When the insignia of the Lord's feet was laid on his head, his desires and pride of self died down as he plunged into the ocean of bliss and light. He had his full, while the hoary seers still hungered for His Vision.

> "The ether, the skies, fire, water and earth
> May perish, but He remains everlasting:
> Unto Him, I've offered body, mind, and soul;
> My 'Ego' dissolved, shall we not sing and dance,
> Tellenum?"
>
> 11. 18.

No more births; no more griefs; no more forgetfulness; He appeared before me and my meaningless existence and selfishness paled into insignificance. "Shall we not sing exuberantly, 'Tenna, Tenna' and dance Tellenum?". 11. 19.

> "Shall we not bask in the sunshine of His Love?
> His radiant Joy,
> Shall steal upon our hearts and entwine us in its fold.
> Shall we not taste the ambrosia from His sea of sweetness?
> He pervades this realm. Come, let us meditate on Him.
> We shall spread His Glory. Thus dance we Tellenum".
>
> 11. 15.

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CHAPTER XIX

TIRUCHALAL: 12. THE SACRED DIALOGUE
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: ON SIVA'S COMPASSIONATE ENERGY

This lyric is beautiful in form and falls under the class of the dialogue of ideas, represented by the dialogues of Plato. The aim is the logical establishment of a definite set of ideas. In this case the puranic references relating to Siva and embodied in the tenets of Saivism are interpreted. The background of the dialogue creates an attitude of sympathy, and arouses interest in the subject. It is said that the poet here appears to refute the arguments of the Buddhist priests through the lips of the Buddhist princess from Ceylon, whose dumbness he had cured; she rebuts their arguments against Siva's manifestations and His sports as illustrated in the puranas. The mystical meaning of each of His manifold appearances and acts is brought out clearly; so the final effect on the reader is more exhilarating than if we had read the arguments in the way of direct exposition.

"Chalal" is a kind of a game in which the verse is the accompaniment. The first two lines of each verse contain the answer. Usually it is sung by a chorus of girls with much clapping of hands. The main purpose of the poem is to convey the true glory of the Lord, by bringing out the esoteric meaning of the rituals, insignia and puranic episodes connected with the Lord. Some commentators think that the poem also contains a refutation of the Buddhist precepts as practised in his day. There is no internal evidence however to prove the truth of this incident, nor of his curing the dumb princess from Ceylon.

The Lord is Infinite, Transcendent; He manifests Himself to man, through His Grace which is symbolised by the Sakti-Uma by His side. The poet has stressed the validity and the authority of the Agamic scriptures as the revealed "word of God" throughout this poem. The frequent allusion to

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the story of "Thakkan" makes it clear that even from arrogance, the Lord saves souls and shows mercy upon them. Egoism (Ahankara) is one of the root evils of man and the devas, and its dominance proves fatal to the ultimate happiness of man. The poet relates some of the anecdotes where the Lord has cured the devas of their pride, rescued Brahma and Vishnu from their Ahankara or self love. He showed them infinite mercy even when they erred, and drank the destructive poison that emanated from the sea of milk and thereby saved them. The Lord manifests Himself to us in time of need and danger, and saves us not by His sublime glory, but by his lowly grace and meek love.

TIRU POOVALLI: YE TENDER LILIES

PLACE: TILLAI

QUINTESSENCE: A SONG OF VICTORY OVER ILLUSION

This lyric is a hymn of victory over "Maya" or the fleeting pleasures of life. Young children call their playmates to cull flowers for offering them at the feet of the Lord. The Editors of the Siddhanta Deepika in the February issue of 1898 argued thus: "The word Poo — Al — Il means 'Poomi' or world — 'Irulai' or darkness, the negative of these, and the whole phrase gives the esoteric meaning, 'Release from the dark world of Maya'. The chorus in each verse 'pluck away the dark world,' seems to bring out this sense more particularly also. This darkness can only vanish when the light dawns on the horizon. The hymn begins with the line: 'By placing the gracious, lotus Feet on my head, my bonds are released'. This interpretation is discarded by many modern critics. Such esoteric rendering does not fit in with our idea of lyrical poetry.

We may attempt another interpretation. The plucking of flowers is one of the delightful pastimes of young girls in India and the refrain in this poem is a reminder to all of us to seek the most pleasurable outlet of service unto the Lord. If we can dedicate our work at His Feet, it will lead us to the mastery over the world's suffering. The flowers of

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service should be woven into a garland for offering it at His Feet. The children in the act of plucking the flowers, sing of the Lord who lives in the honeycomb, buried in the heart of the 'marutha' tree; some think that it refers to the shrine of Tiruvidaimarutur. The poet seems to admonish the seekers of God not to search fruitlessly each flower for a little honey but to reach the honeycomb itself, where they could inexhaustively taste its sweetness. Dedicated work is the sovereign remedy to overcome worldly infatuations. The man of evil deeds deserves to be spurned like a stray dog but the Lord, much more loving than our earthly mother, puts up with man's false beliefs and eradicates his evil tendencies. Daksha and the many devas who asserted their egoism, contrary to the will of the Lord, were punished but even they were ultimately saved by His compassion, when they did penance. Those who seek sincerely for ever-lasting happiness are sure to find it within themselves. Many well-known examples are cited from religious literature, where the Lord had given refuge to the helpless, whenever they appealed to Him.

The One who manifested Himself as the Triad, has given each human being an adequate vehicle in order to work out his release from the bonds of ignorance. 13. 6. Our thought, word and deed must be dedicated to worship Him. "So bow to the Lord with your head and with your mouth praise His victorious Foot. Join the Society of Bhaktas and learn by example and by precept." 13. 7. "He showed me the true path of life and the reason for His consecrating me was to free me from the cares of worldly acts and deeds, above all from deadly desires." 13. 8. If we love Him and follow the way of love, He would show us the way to Bliss. That was the significance of His Dance at Tillai.

Finally the poet recounts classical instances of the Lord's manifestation of Grace to Mandodari, the chief queen of Ravana, King of Lanka, and to the Devas who were threatened by the sea of poison. He who burnt Tripura, the powerful One, also appeared as a humble Guru, in whose service our saintly bard found endless joy.

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TIRU UNTHIYAR: 14. THE SACRED VICTORY
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE TRIUMPHS OF GRACE

"Unthiyar" is supposed to mean the players at a game played in a circle, where the ball is sent flying aloft. The poem opens with the incident of the destruction of the three towns of Tripura by Siva, which mystically may mean the destruction of the "three delusions" of man. When man reaches the stage of inner illumination ("Mala Paripagam" and "Iruvinai Oppu") he is ready to receive the Grace of the Lord. This idea is poetically connected by a reference to the puranic episode, when Siva was accompanied in a chariot drawn by Brahma, with Vishnu as his arrow, Agni the barb, Yama its feather, the vedas the bow, and Gayatri as the bow-string and then one wheel sank. It only showed that without the benediction of His Grace, any amount of careful preparations could be of no avail. His smile can relieve loads of evil, minimise the powers of "Anava, Karma and Maya" and penetrate the hidden recesses of man's being.

The account of Daksha is also symbolic of the "vanitas vanitatem" of the intelligent beings. They also are brought low, as indicated in Daksha's sacrifice, punishment, forgiveness and penance. Even the devas and mighty asuras, Ravana, Vidhi and Bhagan come under the rule of law and justice but the purpose of these references consists in proving the efficacy of God's mercy. Man depends for victory over "egoism" and the "action of deeds", upon the Grace of the Lord.

In this ode, the poet suggests that we should not belittle the glory of Siva, the supreme Lord, who had condescended in many humble ways to reveal His Grace to suffering humanity. By relating the illustrious, heroic and gracious feats of Siva as narrated in the Hindu Scriptures, the poet establishes the supremacy of Lord Siva. In the same way as the ball flies up on the force of a hit from the racket, so also the Lord hits at man's "Three Malas" and sends them flying away, thereby freeing man to enjoy the magnitude of His ("Gnana Sakti") wisdom.

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TIRU THONOKKAM: 15. THE SACRED THONOKKAM
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE PROCESS OF PURIFICATION

The Rasa in this poem is a combination of novelty and humour. There is an underlying tone of the inexorable law of order to which all things great and small bow down, but there is also the liberating balm of the Lord's Love. Thonokkam may be a kind of folk dance where the children aim at touching the shoulders of their partners. The dance of Siva is the central factor that cleanses the universe. Man everywhere has pursued the mirage and has lost his grip on reality. A true understanding of the cosmic dance of Siva at Tillai can endow man with purity and wisdom.

The Lord cannot be drawn by the costliest of pujas and ritual as enjoined in the Vedas. There is no parallel in the history of man that can be compared to the devotion of St. Kannappar. 15. 3. His offering of sandals and meat, far from polluting the altar of the Lord was transmuted to golden petals of love. The Lord draws man by the net of Love. 'In the same manner did He enslave me with one word.' He transformed the rash deeds of some of his Siva-bhaktas like Chandesvarar into acts of dharma. 15. 7. He purges our pride and self-will by His mighty love. If we meditate on His Divine Dance, we begin to see life as a whole. Much analysis can only distract and confuse man, and should therefore be shunned. It behoves man to arise from his stupor and espouse His Love; His grace will grant him insight into Truth, so that whatever he does would have the ring of reality eternal, born of sacrifice. The futility of all acts of man on earth can be combated only in sacrificial service to God in love. 15. 13. Then deliverance delectable will be his reward. This was the experience of the poet, and he conveys these ideas in simple poetry.

"The moment, He became my inner Light
That moment, I crossed the sea of desire.
The moment that I starved my preying senses,
That moment, they fled helpless from me!
Ego annihilated, "I am" — thus play we Thonokkam".

15. 14.

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This stanza expresses the great purge in the life of the saint. How did he achieve deliverance from the tyranny of the senses? He was a fine target for the birds of prey, while he was voyaging in the sea of life. Once he had seen the light of the cosmic Dancer, these vultures (mystically, the senses that cause confusion in life) were starved, as there was no prey for them to feed upon. He was saved from their clutches by the Grace of the Lord, who is the essence of Goodness and Purity in the Universe. The children's movements as they perform the 'Kummi' dance resound the victory song of deliverance.

TIRU PONNUSAL: 16. ROCK THE GOLDEN SWING
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE CLEANSING POWER OF COMPASSION

In this ode, the Poet speaks of the divine grace that flooded his heart and purified it. It may have been composed at Tillai, where dwelt the poet in the later stages of his life, and he might have recalled his reminiscences centering round the Uttarakosa Mangai Shrine.

The swing is one of the popular forms of recreation in India. After the Kummi dance of the last canto, the children settle down quietly on the swing and rock themselves to the sweet music of this song, which suggests tranquillity and repose. The wave of dejection that had swept over the poet at his enforced separation from the Lord has given place to calm contemplation.

In this lyric, the poet depicts the vision that sweetened his existence. The compassion of the Lord took the form of Siva-Sakti as manifested at Uttara Kosa Mangai shrine, and appeared to him whenever he stood in need of its succour. The Lord whom he addresses as His Father and Mother in one, rocked him on the swing of love, and wiped out his sinful deeds. He recalls the vision he saw of Siva Sakti, who looked so enchanting like a beauteous peacock dancing on a swan (16. 7). The Lord and His Grace also appeared to him riding on a charger 16. 8. When tormented by the Pandyan King in the days of his ministerial role, the Lord himself led the procession of horses; and so inter-

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pret some critics this allusion to the incident of the horses which later turned into jackals. Manivachakar's theme is to extol, ponder and pass on to everyone the purificatory healing influence of the Lord in his compassionate form with Sakti by His side. He can derive great happiness only by singing unceasingly on His Grace. His grateful Love finds perfect expression in this form of poetry.

ANNAI PATHU: 17. "MOTHER!" SAID SHE
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE SOUL'S PLENITUDE

The following ten stanzas delineate the height of Manivachakar's faith in his Guru. It is in the form of a love poem where the girl (the poet) addresses her mother and tells her about the irresistible charms of her Beloved. Only a mother can understand the pangs of Love of her daughter, who seeks an outlet to her love by dwelling on the imposing grandeur of her Lord. The recurrence of the refrain — mother mine — in the second and fourth lines of each of the ten stanzas adds to the resonant pathos of the verse. The rhyme follows the sound of the cymbals which signifies the vibrating "Nadam", energy of the Lord. 17. 1.

"He — her beloved — is the eternal bridegroom,
who has stolen her heart."
17. 3.

She saw him clad in tiger skin, with the emblems of the snake and holy ash. This may be symbolic of His acts of Preservation, Creation, and Dissolution respectively. "Having fallen in Love with Him mother mine, my soul is pining for Him." 17. 4.

"He came a-begging at my door and the alms of love I gave. No sooner had He gone than my heart sinks in grief. Why is this so mother mine?" 17. 9.

"Crowned with cassia and the crescent, the vilvam and phrenzies, the great and beauteous lover had bewitched me with the madness of love. What a wonder, mother mine." 17. 10. In these endearing lines of artless verse, our Poet celebrates his love to the Lord in the form of "Ahathurai" or lyrical poetry.

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KUYIL PATHU: 18. THE KUYIL DECAD
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: A PLEA FOR A GREATER MEASURE OF LOVE

The love-lorn damsel coaxes the cuckoo which is mystically the human soul to call on her divine mate. Manivachakar's heart is as expansive as the boundless ocean and he can only satisfy that insatiable longing for Him, by singing the Glory of his Beloved. The poet invites the sweet-throated Kuyil to convey the message of his intense love to the Master.

He who remained inaccessible to the Gods, showed His Grace to Mandodari, the virtuous Queen of Lanka. 18. 2. He takes up his abode in the shrines like Tirupperunturai and Uttara Kosa Mangai in order to be accessible to his devotees. He made me despise the transient pleasures by purging me of my ignorance. 18. 5. Then the sense of differences too disappeared and in unity I beheld Him everywhere. To his loved disciples, he is the fascinating Beloved, the perennial source of bliss. St. Manikkavachakar then refers to the Lord's act of mercy in saving him from the fierce wrath of the Pandyan King, by riding on a charger and delivering the horses. 18. 6. He makes no distinctions. He vouchsafed the self-same Grace on Brahma and Vishnu by appearing before them as a great luminous flame. He is the lord who is worshipped by the mighty monarchs of the Chera, Chola and Pandyan dynasties. 18. 7. He is also mine; he came down to earth as a Brahmin Guru and initiated me as one belonging for ever to his band of devotees. He called me to Him by the injunction, "He is one of us". 18. 10.

Step by step, Manivachakar portrays the secret of the working of Grace at different levels. The Lord grants His solace to the Gods who appeal to Him in their time of distress. He is also the refuge of the helpless who are under the spell of evil powers as Mandodari was under Ravana. He is the saviour of those humble folk who waver and err and who like our bard was directed to the path of Truth. He grants His grace to those who seek Him in the favourite shrines like Perunturai or Tillai. "In whatever form ye

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seek me, I heed your cry", seems to be the essence of this lyric.

Thus the central idea is that whoever approaches Him with great love, is sure to find refuge. The poet speaks in moving language of his consecration. He was singled out to sing His glory. The more he sips from the cup of Love, the more attuned he becomes to sing the song of love. There is no force that can stop the current of his love flowing to the Ocean of Bliss.

TIRU THASANGAM: 19. THE ROYAL INSIGNIA
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE INSIGNIA OF REGAL SPLENDOUR

We get a description of the ten insignia, usually attributed to the kings, but which Manikkavachakar has worked out for his King of Kings. The parrot is called upon by the poet to recount the various insignia of the Lord Supreme. (Vide Kirti Tiru Ahaval 2. 101; 124).

The name of the King of Kings, Lord of Devas, is Lord Siva — "Sivaperuman". His sacred domain from where he wields sway over his devotees is the Pandya land. Uttarakosa Mangai is His sacred abode. His river is the stream of joy that pours forth bliss and purifies the hearts of men. 19. 4.

The rock that points the way to Mukti or release is the Mount of Grace, which dispels the darkness of the world and sends out rays of wisdom, which turn the soul to the light. 19. 5.

He rides on the celestial steed, accompanied by the melodious chanting of the divine maids there. 19. 6.

He wields the Trident, which destroys the "Three Malas" and frees His loved saints from the bondage of births. 19. 7.

He holds the source of vibrant sound "Nadam" as His Drum and that shall confound man's innate foes and trumpet the sweet music of divine bliss. 19. 8.

The Lord's garland is made of the creeper grass "Arugu", which shall ward off evil. 19. 9.

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The stainless banner of the bull waves high while the foes are cowed down in defeat. 19. 10.

Thus the King of Tirupperunturai reigned supreme in the poet's heart and these ten royal symbols were sealed in his heart as a proof of his eternal fidelity and servitude.

These thirteen lyrics form a unit of experience, wherein the poet dwells on the wondrous ways in which the Lord's Grace has manifested down the ages. The links in the chain of Grace that bind him and his master are also described with spontaneity and freshness. They possess a unity of form, idea and even time. Tiruvannamalai, Tillai and Uttarakosa Mangai are extolled in these lyrics. If he were still on the road to Tillai, then the Tillai lyrics in this section would seem inconsistent. Therefore we are of opinion that he recollected these experiences associated with the shrines he had visited, and in the tranquillity of Tillai, he might have given them the final shape.

The peace and buoyancy that mark these cantos, both in thought, feeling and expression strongly indicate that this could have been possible only when the poet had realised the peace in Tillai. The poetry is pure; thought is subordinated; the fascination for the abstract is less potent, and the poetic 'rasa' of Santi is pre-eminent in these lyrical odes.

These thirteen lyrics mark the finest epitome of the Hindu ideal of Divine Grace. Even the Gods Vishnu and Brahma have tasted the bliss of Siva's Grace. In the hour of trial, asuras and devas, Thakkan and Echan, Yama, Sun, Moon and Fire have called upon the Lord Siva for help and been blessed. To those in company with the foes of Truth, to Mandodari and the asuras of Tripura, He showed His tender compassion. The life story of the humble devotees whose love surpassed the heights and depths of understanding, like St. Kannappar and St. Chandeswara are a testimony to His overpowering grace. He came down to earth as a Guru and melted the poet's stony heart. He transmuted his despicable life, and tuned his heart to overflow with sweetness of bliss and love. In the Cosmic Dance, He enacts His five-fold activity and reveals it at Tillai. His grace flows into every nook and corner of the world, purifying the hearts

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of men. Manivachakar has implicit faith in the sovereignty of His Grace to lead man to the Bliss of Union with Siva.

Though the Ocean of Bliss (Ananda) may lie at our feet, we shall continue to thirst for its refreshing waters, if the Lord does not will to give it to us. We can take only that which comes from Him. Of our own accord we cannot sip the waters of grace and quench our dying thirst. He must teach us first how to sip it, and then we shall know not only to sip but quaff and shall never know any satisfaction, till we are filled with its honeyed sweetness. By singing His praises, we can learn to love Him and His world, and thus steadfastly, we shall be led to the refuge of His Blessed Feet. They also serve who only sing of HIM and His Grace.

CHAPTER XX

TIRU PALLI ELUCHI: 20. THE MORNING HYMN
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: DARKNESS RECEDES WITH THE DAWN

The night gives us rest and recoups our strength. In this lyric, the call is to the inner self of man to awaken from his slumber and use his potent energies with the aid of the rays of the morning sun, and realise the high purpose for which he is born in this earth.

In Tirupperunturai, Manikkavachakar was first awakened from the slumber of worldly power and ease to face the light of God's Grace. While journeying from Madura, for the purpose of purchasing horses for his royal Master, the sun of Truth appeared in the guise of a teacher under the Kuruntha Tree and enlightened him to realise the destiny of his soul. The darkness that enveloped him hitherto receded. He was exceedingly happy in the company of his Guru and His holy Saints, when one day they too left him. The Poet pictures his God Guru in the state of involution, a state of passive non-activity, and he adopts the form of popular Hindu worship in India to awaken the Lord to gra-

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cious activity. This reveille is the first business in all the Hindu temples.

Tondaradippodi Alwar also has sung a morning hymn which has the same refrain "Will Thou not wake up and arise, my Lord?" In his "Holy Garland", the Lord wakes up the poet to realise the highest Truth, whereas in this poem, we see Manivachakar waking up the Lord to reveal His Grace and save him from the snares of the world. St. Alwar tells us of the Lord's efforts to save him and Manivachakar recounts his own efforts to awaken the Lord. Both the poems are thus complementary. They describe the natural sights and sounds of morning with equal felicity and are at one in their request to serve Him along with His devotees.

In the first verse, the poet hails the Lord as the capital investment of his life. The refrain, "My Lord, will Thou not arise from Thy repose?" is full of tenderness. He imagines the Lord to be in the 'Tirobhava" or "Veiling" state.

'Tis Dawn.....
I invoke thee by my altar flowers at thy flowery Feet,
So that thy Grace might flower in my heart."

20. 1.

His beauteous smile of grace is like the opening of the lotus petals in the ponds around the shrine at Perunturai.

"Thou Rock of Joy,
Freely give unto me from thy treasure of Grace."

20. 2.

"Thou who art beyond
The wisdom of the wisest and the friend of the lowly.
Arise, from thy repose."

20. 3.

Delightful scenes welcome the morning. The cocks crow; the larks sing; the small birds join in chorus; the conch shells sound; the starlight pales before the rising glory of the sun. While nature revels in activity after the repose of the night, inside the temple are heard the songs from the lute and the veena. The Vedic hymns are chanted, and flower garlands

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offered. The devotees worship him, some by singing, some by crying, and some in silent adoration.

"That I too may continue
To feel the warmth of thy love,
My Lord, will Thou not arise?"

20. 4.

"Besides singing and dancing in praise of Thee,
We do not know of any one who has seen Thee.
Thou who art beyond human thought, come before us
And steady us from our trials by thy loving Grace".

20. 5.

In the Temple, some worship Him in the attitude of loving spouses. The poet longs to see his Beloved, face to face. He doubts if in this birth, he could ever join Him and so his plea is to release him from the burden of birth. He also believes that the Lord's presence can be felt intimately by his loved devotees in the temples. Some discover Him in this form and some in that, but all the same they understand His transcendence as well. Ever since Manivachakar was consecrated by Him, his past had dissolved. He now wondered what his new role might be with the new master. So he asks plaintively, "What service will Thou deign from us, let us know, Oh Lord," 20. 7. It is true that the Lord and his Sakti dwell in the lowly hearts of the faithful. Blessed are the poor in heart. 20. 8. Manica Peruman recalls the memories of the day when He revealed His form to him at Perunturai. "My Nectar divine, will thou not arise from thy repose?

"Thou art the object of Life, the essence of the world.
Come with thy beauteous Grace".

20. 9.

Again and again, he wants to see this vision. Even the Gods regret why they are not born on earth, because it is the place where one can enjoy the bliss of Grace. "So come Thou with Thy Grace (Sakti) and save us — Oh, refreshing Energy, my ambrosia." 20. 10.

The poem reveals the high water mark of spiritual development of our seer. Others sing, chant, meditate, but he has crossed these stages of Charya, Kriya and Yoga paths,

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on account of his enlightenment by his Guru. Therefore he puts the crucial question:

"In what way will thou deign to get our service?
Thou who art the apple of the Eye, radiating joy.
Arise from thy repose and illumine me thy bondsman."

The Poet invokes the Lord's Immanence in this World when he sings:

"Therefore Come, Come Thou and Thy Sakti
And illumine us all by thy Light."

20. 10.

KOYIL MOOTHA TIRUPATIKAM: 21. THE ANCIENT TEMPLE SONG

PLACE: TILLAI.

QUINTESSENCE: THE EVERLASTING REALITY

In the first verse of this song which has golden Tillai (Chidambaram) with the ancient temple of Sri Nataraja as its background, we get a memorable picture of the Lord and His divine consort in their relationship to the world and man. Srila Sri Siva Arunagiri Mudaliar calls this verse the key gem (Mantra Sloka) of Tiruvachakam, as it contains the quintessence of advaitic experience.

Sakti bides in thy midst, as Thou in her midst.
And if ye both dwell within me who am thy very own,
Then Oh, Primal Lord whose being knows no end,
Who dwells in the sacred golden Hall of Tillai,
Thy presence before me I crave to fulfil my heart's intent
Which is to dwell in the midst of thy holy devotees.

21. 1.

The term Siva-Sakti (Uma-Sivakami) connotes one who possesses everything. Complete possession and ownership are indistinguishable from the owner. 'Para Sakti' is the manifested grace of Siva, through whom the Lord carries out his five-fold acts in the world. The Supreme one cannot be perceived by man except through the manifestations of Grace. Thus we become aware of the Lord only in the midst of Sakti, who is symbolic of His Grace. The supplication of the poet is significant in that it embodies an important aspect of Hinduism.

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"Sakti in Siva; Siva in Sakti:
They in me; I in them:
And we in the midst of the Lord's 'Chosen',
So that we may all be one with Thee".

After singing the 'Morning Hymn', we notice a gradual change in Manivachakar's form of addressing his Lord and master. He beseeches that the Lord should manifest before him with His Grace. The Poet dwells more and more on the aspect of Ammai-Appa and the dasa marga imperceptibly merges into the Satputra-Sanmarga paths.

The term 'thy bondsman', should at this stage be interpreted as connoting a more intimate relationship with the master than that of a servant. This term denotes fuller possession, greater love and closer relationship than that implied in Dr. Pope's translation of it as "Servant", which term deprives the word 'Adiyen' of elevated love, such as only a child can respond to a father or mother.

In the early stages of address, when fear, wonder and reverence characterised his relationship with the Master, the poet in all humility placed himself as His absolute bondsman. When the growing love takes possession of him, he looks upon the Lord of the worlds with the tenderness of a loving devotee and craves for the tender care and love of the Father and Mother in one.

This temple song reveals also another important facet of Saivism. In every stanza is established the ancient reality of the relationship of the Siva-bhaktas with their object of love — the eternal, everlasting companionship. The whole psalm is filled with the perfume of the lakshana of the sanctified souls in whose midst, the saint longs to enter.

"Into the holy company of thy devotees admit me graciously.
Turn not thy face from me, my all-in-all, Lord of Tillai."
21. 3.

Day and night a lone heron waits on the river bank patiently for its food and grows weary, for none comes its way. It cannot give up its search for the urge to sustain itself impels it to remain there and wait on. 21. 5. Manivachakar likewise imagines himself to be a heron. He waits in patience and wails before the bank of Tillai, while he

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sees the Lord and Sakti hold their assembly in the golden 'Chit-Sabai'! He stands at the distant shore and yearns to share this joy with the 'Tiru Thondar' (devotees true).

A lost sheep straying without a shepherd is always a touching sight. Manivachakar compares himself to one such stray sheep, and his lamenting prayer for reunion with the other sheep is followed by tears of anguish, that the pathos of his aches and groans pulsates in our hearts, as we recall our own lost lives and join with him in his petition, that lost sheep are we all, Oh Lord, but take us back to thy fold.

> "Call us to the blessedness of Thy fold
> Where Thou and Thy 'chosen' play and ramble.
> Oh, Life of my Life".
>
> 21. 6.

St. Manivachakar believes that by extolling His holy name, he and we too can gain entry into the sacred heritage of the cosmic dancer — Ponnambalam — and overcome our sense of frustration, forlornness and rejection.

Sivagnana Siddhiar in Sutra XII, Adikarana 1 and 2 explains similarly the nature of the sanctified Siva Gnani and it is in these ways that the poesy of Manivachakar helps to perfume the philosophical tenets of Siddhanta: "The Sivagnanis, in order to get rid of the three 'pasas' (bonds) which prevent them from uniting themselves to the lotus Feet of the Supreme, join the company of God's devotees and worship them; and the forms in temples they behold as His Form, and sing in praise, dance in delight and become fully conscious of the greatness of Sivagnanis; they bow in obeisance to the devotees, and they wander in freedom about the world". This same idea is brought out in Chandogya Upanishad VII. 25. 2.

God dwells as the Soul of Soul in each human body designed for the purpose of reaching the Imperceptible One, and infuses His own Intelligence into each one of them. Therefore the form of His devotee is His Form. It is in this strain that St. Appar and St. Sambandar have sung many a hymn and Manivachakar too in several psalms has extolled the bliss of the realised Jivan Muktas (liberated souls).

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"They sport in merry laughter, revel in glee;
They come together in advaitic unison,
And chant, praise and expound Thy holy word.
They retire alone to contemplate on Thy holy name,
They adore Thee as their Beloved Lord
Who holds His blissful dance at the golden Hall."

21. 9.

KOYIL TIRU PATIKAM: THE TEMPLE LYRIC
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE LAKSHANA OF EXPERIENCE

This poem is one of the most popular lyrics in Tiruvachakam where the beauty (lakshana) of realisation is described. The stream of love wends its way to the ocean of Wisdom. In Tillai the House of God, after wanderings far and wide, the poet stands face to face before the cosmic Dancer. He had been directed by his Guru to go to Tillai and when he reached the temple at Tillai his joy was limitless. Tillai, the most revered shrine in South India, is at Chidambaram where the Lord "His mystic dance holds". But Tillai, the temple of God, is also located in the human heart, "made beauteous by the grace of God."

Manikkavachakar sings this song of fulfilment of Love. The experience here recorded is the goal of the 'bhakti-yogi' who seeks realisation by the way of Love, increasing the circle of Love indefinitely, till the One Universal Love is reached. This discipline of temple worship with its services and prayers is designed to foster and gradually purify the heart making it fit to be a temple of God, 'His great, holy shrine'.

Once he makes his direct address (Svabadesham) to the Lord, "Give me grace to see Thee as Thou art", the poet speeds his tempo in this grand symphony of Love.

"Oh Supreme splendour! Come Thou as Love
Come Thou as Joy, come to me as Thou art."

22. 1.

He works up step by step, the causes, effects and accessory feelings necessary to intensify the permanent emotional state of bliss, the 'Santi' of realisation that he depicts in the closing psalm of this lyric.

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The cause of his present state of happiness, he attributes to the crucial experience of his life, when he encountered his Guru-Gem.

"Thou bestowed on me sweet grace,
Beyond my mortal capacity to relish;
And I have no return to offer Thee".

22. 2.

The effect of the appearance of the sun of life in his horizon is thus delineated in Manivachakar's emotional experience of Love. Then he traces the accessory feelings by dwelling on the various attributes of his precious Guru, whose glory transcends all other powers on earth. Finally in the last stanza, he embodies in mystic language the rasa of 'Santi', that blissful consciousness wherein his true relationship with the supreme Beloved stands revealed.

The pilgrim-poet has transmitted his experiences by means of a series of questions addressed to the Lord, who is extolled in His manifold forms of splendour, wisdom, love and bliss.

"Father mine, perfection sublime, unfailing guide,
What more do we want in thy presence?"

22. 4.

"Thou gavest Thy love to me
What have I done to Thee?"

22. 5.

"Light of Truth that tramples falsehood!
How shall I speak of Thee?
O, healing balm of Life — Nearer to Thee,
I feel such exceeding joy.
What do I lack in nearness to Thee?

22. 6.

Here are some more of his Socratic questions addressed to the Lord:

"Thou hast made my body, thine abode,
What more could I beg of Thee?"
"Thou who art in all and naught in all,
Who can magnify thy resplendence?"

22. 7.

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"Thou radiant Bliss, my kith and kin, who are they?
Who is my neighbour?"

22. 8.

"How can Thou go away from me now,
After Thou had'st entered into my being?"

22. 9.

"My peerless Father, for taking thy abode in my dwelling house,
What return can I offer Thee?"

22. 10.

"Oh, Splendour that magnifies within me
In proportion to my own begging,
Having seen Thee face to face today, I rejoice."

22. 6.

The poet recalls that like a stream rushing down from the snowy heights of a mountain, breaking all bounds in the swiftness of its flow, so also, Siva's love and grace rushed torrentially into the crevices of his heart, and filled it to the brim, so that he became conscious of none else but Him.

"O Supreme Splendour that rises within me!
O Ambrosia that wells up and blocks
The outlets of my deluding senses five!
Show Thyself to me in Grace as Thou art—
Essence of Purity, Lord Siva,
Dweller in the great and holy shrine,
Thou who transcends all happy states without end,
My Love sublime, Oh bliss ineffable.

22. 1

With love Thy bondsman's body and soul melt in bliss.
Sweet grace by me not deserved, Thou did'st grant.
For this I have naught to give in return.
Thou who pervades o'er all, before and after,
Oh Thou free One! Principle everlasting!
Dweller in the great southern shrine, Lord Siva,
The Sovereign of the beauteous realms.

22. 2.

O King, to me a bondsman of thy Faithful,
Art Thou the Father. My body and soul
Did'st Thou penetrate and melt away
All my falsehood dim, O Light of Truth!
Calm, clear, full ocean of Ambrosia,

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Dweller in the great holy shrine, Siva —
Experience Thou, that surpasseth all experiences,
Teach me how I could speak of Thee?

22. 3.

Thou that art not known nor felt in experience
By the Seers of great wisdom nor by celestials —
Thou that art the source of Life to all diverse beings,
Our healing balm that cures me of life's afflictions.
Purest Space that came forth from dense darkness,
Dweller in the great holy shrine, Siva —
O Bliss immaculate, beyond the ken of gunas,
What else can they lack who have neared Thee?

22. 4.

Perfect Fullness, flawless Ambrosia,
Mount of endless flaming light!
O King who came as the Vedas and its meaning,
And did enter the portals of my being,
Breaking all bounds like the rushing torrent.
Siva, dweller in the great holy Shrine,
Sovereign Lord, who hast made my body thy abode,
What else can I now beg of Thee?

22. 5.

O Splendour that relumes my heart,
To the intensity of my asking do I melt.
Thy lily-feet adorn the crowns of celestials,
Siva, dweller in the great holy Shrine,
Who art all-pervading, space and water,
Earth, fire and air, and yet art not seen
In these and other forms around.
How I rejoice, having seen Thee this day!

22. 6.

This day in mercy unto me, my darkness dispelled,
Thou filleth my heart as yonder morning Sun.
Thy mode of rising I comprehend not by thought.
There being naught else but Thou, atom by atom
All things great and small change and merge
Into thy oneness, Siva, dweller in the holy Shrine.
Tho' Thou art not in this and that, yet art Thou
The essence in all — who, oh who can know Thee?"

22. 7.

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Manivachakar works out the symbol of light and darkness most exquisitely in the above stanza. 'Like the rising sun that drives away the gloom, the Sun of Grace riseth today within my heart. I've seen with my inner eye thy true nature and ceaselessly ponder, there is naught else but Thee. My dim sense of unreality wanes little by little, as nearer and nearer I draw unto thy light. In no objects, are Thou manifest. Who can know Thee'? Svetasvatara Upanishad Mantras 16 and 20 also resound the same sentiments. "Surely is He the Guardian of all in every creature hid; in whom the seers of Brahm, powers divine are (all) conjoined. Thus knowing Him, one cuts the bonds of Death. Him knowing (in his form, benign Siva) in every creature hid, thought One, yet all embracing, knowing Him God, from every bond, one is free". "Smaller than small, yet greater than great, in the heart of these creatures God doth repose. That free from desire he sees clearly with his grief gone, by His Grace".

The soul was embedded in darkness; then the ray of light from the sun of Mercy (God-Guru) entered. As ignorance wanes before the light of God, the soul perceives the Pure Intelligence and there is no conscious differentiation of subject and object. The Lord and the Atma exist in this state of everlasting union and bliss where the Pure Intelligence, Sat, has drawn the 'satasat' impure Intelligence, into its own, making it shed off its impurity that has been the cause of its separation, of differentiation. Vide Tirumular's Tirumantiram — First Tantra No. 8.

If one fixes God in the light engendered in himself by concentration of attention inwards, and adores Him in that condition and then desires for His Grace, the Lord will grant his desires, being in himself. Every blind man's desire is to regain his eyesight but, supposing he regained his eyesight, will the darkness be removed, which formerly pressed on his eye? Not, surely, unless the Glorious sun (God) deigns to reveal to him in His Supreme Mercy. And the sun is of course of no use to the blind so long as his blindness lasted. So he has to realise himself by being balanced in pleasure and pain, and by the removal of his egoism and realise his Lord, till now hid in his heart.

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People of all ages and climes have asked and will ask always whether there is pleasure from this passage from bondage to freedom. Manikkavachakar bids us to consider the case of the blind man passing from darkness to sudden light. Will there be pleasure or not?

Gleaming as the earth and all the spheres,
Oh, Thou expanse of matchless Effulgence!
Source of fire in water, Pure One beyond compare.
Sweetness that wells forth in the heart
Made beauteous by the gushing waters of Grace.
Siva, dweller in the great holy Shrine,
Who are my kin? Who my neighbours here?
O splendour mine! To Bliss, lead Thou me on.

22. 8.

In radiant forms art Thou beheld indeed
O Formless One! Incomparably wondrous,
The Beginning, the Middle and the End.
Great Ocean of Bliss who destroys life's ills,
Rock of Grace, distilled goodness, Siva,
Dweller in the great holy shrine,
Wherefore can'st Thou quit me now?
The Refuge of Thy Feet I crave and cling.

22. 9.

Thou gavest Thyself to me and Thou didst take me.
Beneficent Lord! Tell me whose gains are more?
Everlasting Bliss have I scored on my side.
What hast Thou added from me and my largess?
Oh Lord, who art enshrined in the essence of Man,
Siva, dweller in the great holy shrine,
Father mine! Thou did'st come to fortify my body.
Naught have I to give Thee in return!

22. 10.

In the above last stanza, the poet has immortalised the purest form of bliss. It ripples with the innocence of a child of bliss gazing into the eyes of Love infinite and clasping his hands at the brilliant splendour of his Divine Father, questioning Him directly and sweetly as to who would prove victorious in a tug-of-love between them. Here we hear the music of the sweetest song on earth and the beauty of Tiruvachakam is embalmed in this last stanza.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE TESTAMENT OF LOVE

PRE-VIEW

After singing the Temple lyric, the poetry of Manikkavachakar becomes more and more mystical. Bhakti is a mode of recognition in which the soul is concerned with pure "awareness". From the Temple lyric to the last song of the "Testament of Attainment", we trace the upward flight of the emancipated soul towards the final goal of eternal bliss.

In every one of the lyrics that follow, Manikkavachakar's poetry consists of a sinking in rapture, a prayer for consummation and craving for the sole actuality which transcends thought and speech. All great saints pass through the vicissitudes of pain and pleasure, the way of all flesh, the way of all seekers after Truth, through the sting of purgation blind, on to the sloughs of Despond and Despair, till they commingle with the Ananda of Bliss. From pleasure to pessimism, ecstasy to gloom, despair to loneliness, Manikkavachakar soars on the wings of his viewless poesy to the House of Joy. An understanding of the general import of the poetry of "Bhakti" (Spiritual Love) is essential in order to follow the poet, in the last phase of his soul's sublime ascent.

The mind of the poet is filled with eternal forms of Beauty and Perfection which were their materials of thought, their media of observation. The 'Bhakti' literature resorts to the constant employment of musical imagery, as we find in the Testament of Attainment (49):

> "The pure gem's wordless music then shall yield delight".
>
> "The unheard melody of the conch shells resound joyfully."

The condition of joyous and awakened love to which the saintly mystic passes when his purification is at an end, is to him, the state of song. Manikkavachakar does not see

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reality but he hears it, in the lines quoted above. Thought is turned into song and the mind into 'full sweet sound' is changed.

'Bhakti' is entirely a spiritual activity. The quality and method of bhakti is love. One of the western mystics said, "I wish not for anything that comes from thee, but only for thee, O sweetest love". Likewise Manivachakar also reiterates in moving strains, his great desire to attain union with the Lord. The lyrics on 'The Burthen of Life', 'Ode to Dejection' and 'Ode to love' flow with this intimate and impassioned love of the Absolute.

In his journey towards this union, the poet passes through well-marked phases which constitute the mystic way. "One of the marks of the true mystic," says Leuba, "is the tenacious and heroic energy with which he pursues a definite ideal" (Revue Philosophique, July 1902). He is the pilgrim of an inward Odyssey.

In every lyric of Tiruvachakam, the transcendental quality of the 'spiritual spark' becomes predominant, subduing in its service, those vital powers of love and will which we attribute to the heart. Under the spur of intense love, the whole personality of Manivachakar rises in the act of ecstasy to a level of consciousness, at which it becomes aware of a new field of perception. Under this stress of the "Loving sight", Tiruvachakam is stimulated to a new life also, in accordance with the reality which it has beheld.

> "Oh, to sink in Bliss,
> Mingling, for ever mingling with Thy grace,
> Melting and with soul pulsating in rhythmic dance!
> In grace, grant the Bliss of sweet union."

Manivachakar's poetry deals with the different phases of the life of a Bhakta. The awakening of the self to consciousness of Divine reality is described by the poet in many cantos. That the experience is accompanied by intense feelings of joy and exaltation is seen in Tiruchadakam "The Sublime Cento" (5. 8. 9. 10). The soul realises by contrast, its own imperfections, the bondage of existence and the pangs of separation as seen in "The Poet's Prayer" lyric.

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Gradually by self-surrender, cleansing and stripping by the method of purgation, the soul detaches from the things of the senses. It is in this phase, that we find his references to the human body as burdensome and despicable; he hurls scorn on himself for his thraldom to lust, desire and attachment, as in the Ode on Refuge. Thus step by step he moves on to Illumination when he sees the Beatific vision as at Tirukalukunram (30) and Tillai (31).

This is followed by a period of psychic fatigue and mental chaos. This phase is delineated in the Ode to Prayer and continued in the "Lyrical Reverie" in Section IV of Tiruvachakam. The senses are not only cleansed and humbled, but the self is made to concentrate on the Lord:

> "Thou art my all. My Comfort Thou!
> My trepidation Thou! My good and ill Thou art —
> None other have I here" —

The nature of the purifying process is to annihilate self-hood and the adamantine ego-hood of man.

> "Myself," mine — I know no more!
> "Day and night's recurrence know I not" —

In this thorough purging, the soul is in the throes of desolation and cries out that it is abandoned by the Lord. Even the titles of the lyrics in this section give us an idea of the spiritual ennui, the agony of the last purge.

> "I'll yearn, as a cow yearns for her calf,
> Let my pining soul melt in love,
> 'Neath Thy resounding Feet".
>
> 39. 3.

Then follows a state of transcendent vitality — the unitive life pictured in the lyrics on Tillai, the lyric of Flaming Love and The Miracle Ode, which satisfies the three aspects of the Self-knowledge, will and love.

Then we pass on to the true goal of the Bhakta's quest. It is union with the Lord, after the soul has undertaken the last journey to God. His soul is immersed in supreme understanding, wisdom, and eternal peace as in the Ode on The Testament of Attainment.

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In this lyric, we get a vision as over-powering as Dante's final intuition of Reality. The soul in its exalted state is seen stooping down to view the things "of the earth earthy" stripping herself of the insignia of wisdom and power, initiated into the atmosphere of Eternity, and united with the Absolute. The soul "self naughted", becomes pure, plunged in ineffable bliss.

We see that Manikkavachakar uses the language and imagery of earth in a refined and spiritualised sense, to express those things for which he finds no real equivalent in human speech. It is not his fault if we misunderstand him. Alas, "we lack that strong music in the soul".

SETHILA PATHU:	ODE TO DEJECTION
PLACE:	TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE:	SIVANANDA'S BLISS

From the pinnacle of the "Temple Lyric," our poet descends to the earth and unravels the anatomy of frustration and dejection. In a man of God's life, self depreciating is as real as the self-glorifying. Joy that is circumscribed by space and time is fraught with pain. Having had glimpses of the Essence of Truth, the poet is moved to recollect these happy experiences very frequently. "Why should these intimations of eternal Truth not be permanent experiences"? Truly the life of a seeker after the pearl of great price is punctuated on earth by grief and joy in alternation. Each experience of sincere joy is fraught with some pain as long as an earnest pilgrim remains in the tabernacle of his body. The way of the flesh is tantalising and the godly man is not sure of the next step; That which is real eludes him and hence he resolves to die. Of what use is this life if one has lost one's inner purpose? Such was the dilemma of the poet in this lyric.

Every joyful experience of Manivachakar has been followed by the pangs of separation and non-fulfilment. So it had been at the meeting of the master at Tirupperunturai where with one word, "He enslaved me". 23. 2. So it was at Tillai's golden Hall! In his normal habitude, he becomes aware of these sharp contrasts of God-consciousness and self-consciousness, of 'Sivabotham' and 'Thatbotham'. In

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subordinate pride and conceit are chiefly responsible for man's desolation on earth. The apostles of Siva — should be humble and efface all traces of arrogance in them. Sorrow mingles with remorse when he addresses the Lord as to why He ever came into his life and changed his even tenor. Even when He overpowered him, did He not know of his hard-heartedness and stubborn nature? "Is it meet, I weep as a child torn away from the mother's arms"? In this predicament, his aspiration gets stifled and he appeals for help.

"Tell me what I should do.
Thy bidding I await."

23. 6.

In his ailing travail, with the impending fear chilling his heart, eyes wooden and ears hardened (23. 4.), he calls on the divine physician to administer the healing medicine for his spiritual coma.

"Thou called me tenderly and showed thy true grace;
Initiated me in the Way of Truth: Did'st permit me
To join and serve thy holy company. In my perplexity
Dost Thou take delight, oh divine physician!"

23. 8.

The still small voice within the poet assuages his sense of forlornness by reminding him of some of the illustrious acts of compassion of his Master. Did He not save Markandeya? Did His hand not stem the flow of the Ganges? Did not Tirumal invoke His Gracious Feet? So to one who feels so ill and helpless, would He not come, more especially when of His own accord, He took him as one of His chosen ones?

The last verse evokes the peace of Siva by recalling the majesty of His abode at Mount Kailas — the symbol of purest wisdom, silence and illumination.

Oh, ocean of Grace that seeks repose
On the summit of sweet silent Kailas!

23. 10.

ADAIKALA PATHU: 24. ODE ON REFUGE
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: ATTAINMENT OF MATURITY

The poet places himself, all that he is, his imperfections, his ignorance, his insignificance, at the feet of his magnani-

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mous Lord, pleading with Him for the refuge of sweet repose. At the end of the last ode, the Lord seemed to beckon him from the majesty of Mount Kailas, to come to Him and not shudder with lonely despair that would end his life. The poet answers this silent call in this lyric on Refuge: "I seek refuge at Thy Feet".

He describes his dubious state. In a deluge of sorrow, he recalls how the loving dovotees of God left him alone. They had clung to His Feet and gone up; but he still whirls in the confusion of life, subject to all its giddy distractions. Therefore his refrain in this canto is: "I seek refuge at thy Feet". The poet sounds a warning to all lovers of Truth not to subject themselves to the disturbing influences of the fair sex but to hold steadfastly in the pursuit of all that is fair and of lasting value. He bids them take to the path of prayer so that in all their struggles, He may lead them on.

"All my littleness and erring weakness,
Out of thy greatness, Thou forgiveth".

24. 2

Like the shuttle that keeps moving to and fro in the process of weaving, man's mind too wanders restlessly. His safety lies in taking refuge in God who alone can steady him in his high resolves. Manivachakar freely admits that he cannot be sure of the proper approach; the Lord's ways, no one can understand fully. By intellect, He cannot be comprehended.

"I know not how to worship Thee, not knowing Thee.
Nor have I the knowledge to find Thee aright".

24. 9

In the last stanza which is in free verse, the poet's spirit is caught up in the same agony as that of Jesus at Gethsamane, and he utters: "Oh free me from this choking sensation that I suffer. And save me from my inexorable fate". Hear his plaintive cry for the refuge of His Feet as he stepped down into the valley of the shadow of pain singing:

"Thou did freely bestow thy ambrosia of grace,
And in my haste, I gulped down a heapful.
Then it was my ill fate to gasp and choke.
Oh, revive me with Thy life-giving waters

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And save me from this suffocation dire.
Alas my Keeper, be Thou Thy bondsman's refuge."

24. 10.

This idea of seeking the Lord's Refuge is also worked out by Nammalvar who has a memorable stanza in the second canto, Section 9 of Tiruvaimoli. He refers to his soul's fierce and irrepressible thirst for God's love, that makes him quaff like the molten iron. The only panacea against the ills of man is the balm of His Refuge; it is most poignantly conveyed not only by our poet but also by the Alwar Poets in their "Thivya Prabantham" Odes Vide. 10. 10.

These fragments of poesy haunt our memory and give us a kind of vague nostalgia as perfume from a champak flower. It is the incantation of music, poesy and religious faith, rising as a single flame of consciousness, and hence it has the power of establishing relations between beauty and truth.

ASAI PATHU: 25. ODE TO LOVE
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE LAKSHANA OF ASPIRATION

Wave after wave of spiritual yearning follows one another in rapid succession, from the vortex of the "Temple Lyric" at Tillai. These billows break on the shores of our hearts. The surging of Manivachakar's aspiration for fulfilment percolates every fibre of our being and tingles with its ebb or flow. From now onwards, we behold Manivachakar on the basement of Eternity and we follow him from afar, and glimpse into the ken beyond with mute awe and holy prayer.

Our saintly poet had loved many things in life. Like many other mystics before and after him, he had tasted the sweets of life, one by one; fame, wealth, learning, delights of the mind and body, and he found them all bitter. Finally he came to love the most sublime object — the Guru, whom he saw at Tirupperunturai. Then his aspiration to reach Him soars higher and higher. From seeking the reposeful refuge of the Lord's Feet in the Ode on Refuge, he sings on the wings of ineffable yearning for His Presence.

The 'Asai Pathu' or 'Ode to Love' is the outcome in spontaneous self-expression of this holy desire of man the finite, for a vision of the Infinite in habitation and form. In

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the first two lines of each stanza, Manivachakar addresses the Lord of Tillai in moving strains of dialogic relationship. He compels Him to give him a hearing. This persistent cry of "ask and ye shall receive", mingles in each psalm with his unravelling the secret yet sacred skein of the aspirations of his heart on which he strings the pearls of love for his Beloved of Tillai, a noble offering to his omniscient master under whose radiant feet, he finds bliss everlasting.

"My flawless Gem, in Love, I pine, I yearn: —
That Thou may chase the gathering darkness around me
And command me to come to Thee.

25. 1.

That I may see Thee, Oh Honey distilled,
Incomprehensible to many, my father!

25. 2

That Thou may look at me, my face awhile,
And be moved to pity and love.

25. 3.

That I may see Thy Radiance and hold on for ever
To thy blessed feet of compassion.

25. 4.

That my Nectar Sweet be moved to listen
To my Magnificat of praise to Thee.

25. 5.

That the light of Thy Face, Thy sweet benignant smile,
I may see and relish, My father.

25. 6.

That I may magnify Thee as my Lord,
And praise thy name a thousand times.

25. 7.

In the following stanzas of this canto, Manivachakar fondly imagines what he would do, if God grants him all that he has aspired for so far. Here again, we seem to hear the still small voice of the Great Guru who reads our thoughts and our innermost feelings asking the poet, "What will thou do if I give all this that thou ask of me?" That the soul's movement and progress should be in consonance with the sweet will of the Lord is contained in the last four psalms. Here

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the saint's act of worship touches on a high *note* of true realisation (Vide Nammalwar — 751 — who also like Manivachakar pledges his testimony of grateful love, should his Lord grant him his cherished aspirations).

I shall raise my hands in prayer to Thee;
I shall clasp Thy Holy Feet; and call on Thy name.
I shall melt like wax before the flame,
Incessantly calling out, "my Beloved Father".

25. 8.

I shall cast off this body, and enter the
Celestial city of Sivapura. I shall behold Thy
Effulgent Glory. In joyful bliss shall I join
The Society of Thy true devotees.

25. 9.

Then I shall look up, to hear Thee say
With thy beauteous lips, "Fear not" —
The assurance of Thy all-embracing love
Alone can set my Soul at ease and peace.

25. 10.

The aspiration to be in tune with the Infinite urges Manivachakar to cut off all attachments in the world. He cannot and will not tarry any longer on earth. In a simple simile, he gives us a peep into his life before his initiation. He moved in the world like the tamarind pulp in its shell. That he may not be contaminated, the Guru appeared and taught him the ways of Grace. In his revolt against the body, he calls it "the house of filth".

This world was a place where "coming and going" was the established order in the scheme of things, and he could therefore never find solace in life with its fleeting joys. He brings out his own struggles in accents of beauty and pathos; "No guide do I see. A Leader have I none". So he addresses His Father again and again to receive him to the bliss of "Mukti" from where there can be no return. The bard of Tillai expresses in his two-fold wave lengths, the yearning of the finite for the infinite bliss, and the urgency of the soul to free itself from the trammels of the world. Tayumanavar and the Alwars come nearest to our poet in the magnetic, irresistible direct call on the Supreme Father and Guru. The

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yearning of the poet to see Him, visibly, directly, in His manifested form as at Tillai, is resounded in this lyric of aspiration.

CHAPTER XXII

ATHISAYA PATHU: 26. ODE TO WONDER
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE FACETS OF LIBERATION

Manikkavachakar's poetry is impregnated with the element of 'wonder' — the rasa of novelty, which originated in the miraculous enlightenment of the poet under the Kuruntha tree and flowed around the might of His infinite grace. This element of wonder pervades all pure poetry. It enabled Blake to see the world in a grain of sand, and Tiruvalluvar sought it in "Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha", while Kambar, Tolstoy and Shakespeare discovered it in the travails of humanity and its still sad music.

Manivachakar is wrapt in a spirit of reverential wonder and trumpets to the world the wondrous way in which his master called him, even him, into the fold of the society of the holy saints of God. "In wonder, I gazed" is the oft-repeated chorus which conveys the rhythm of his wondrous experience.

Did you know the wonder, oh, the wonder of the great treasure, the gem of rare lustre that came my way; I did not value it, allured as I was with the charms of the fair sex. Yet, my pearl, my incomparable father, He who is without a peer, He took me into His own and enlisted my services in the society of His Saints! 26. 1.

I did not give much thought to analyse my way of life; neither did I espouse the company of the righteous and the just, for ever since I was born, I whirled in sorrow of one kind or another. Yet He appeared before me with grace by His side and proclaimed that I was His bondsman, and took me into the company of His Saints. 26. 2.

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He who is not intelligible to many but understood only by those who are poor in spirit, my father with the triple eye of wisdom and wearing on his shining locks the crescent moon, with the tender grace of a mother, He purified me from the taint of 'Karmic' deeds and accepted me into His select band of saints. 26. 3.

I was considered an eccentric man by the world; I strayed from the path of those that had espoused the way of righteousness. But my weakness did not deter my Father. He guided me so that I did not fall a prey to evil habits and sloth and enrolled me as one of his "chosen band". 26. 4.

My Lord who with the entwined serpent and flame in hand and who performs the mystic dance, turned me from the ignoble service of the world to that of his chosen saints, even though I did not worship Him with conventional rituals. 26. 5.

I neither joined the company of the good and holy men nor meditated on His name. Though I did not pursue the goodly path, yet my benevolent Father saved me from perishing, by accepting me as one of His saintly followers. 26. 6.

My pearl, my precious gem, my coral of lustrous beauty, my own Father, came to me who was enslaved in a cumbersome body and a victim of false desires; He called me, even me, to join His band of saints. 26. 7.

It was decreed that I should for a time fulfil a certain role in this life of mine; and then in mercy He sought me (oh wonder!), lifted me from the yoke of mortality (oh wonder!) and cleansing me of all my delusions (oh wonder!), filled me with the light of wisdom (oh wonder!) and admitted me into His holy companionship — Oh, wonder of wonders! 27. 8.

Like a sweet-scented flower which wafts its fragrance on all objects alike, so moves the Lord in the universe, the unfailing prop of man, the quintessence of life. He is my Father who protected me from those dangerous self-seekers who knew not the Truth, and beckoned me to the select band of His devotees true. Oh the wonder of it all! 27. 9.

This frail body, which I falsely mistook to be an object of value, was embedded in ignorance, and subject to the effect

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of past 'deeds'. The wonder of wonders is that He led me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to the light of Truth. 27. 10.

In this lyric of wonder, the lover of God exposes the true nature of the body, its capricious attitudes, vanities and pursuit of the evanescent joys of life. At the same time he dwells on the wonder of the overflowing love of God, who freed him from all imperfections and who gave him a new lease of life in the company of His devout saints.

There are examples of effective contrasting pictures, one of the favourite devices of poetic workmanship. The saint's depravity is contrasted with the sublime beauty of the Lord. The following lines illustrate the skilful use of epithets which heighten the effect of contrast.

"I whirled in the polluted, corruptible fleshy body . . . Yet my precious pearl, dazzling brilliance of lustrous gems, He made me His and joined me with the saints". 26. 7.

His pursuit of the fleeting pleasures is pitched against the everlasting gifts of truth accruing from the Lord. He approaches the central experience that changed his life so entirely, from different angles of vision, and each time he portrays the self-same event, he gives it a wondrous vesture and discovers a hidden truth hitherto unexpressed. Thereby his communication carries with it the element of surprise.

In the closing stanza, the poet dwells in amazement on the close relationship of the Lord with the Universe and the soul of Man. The Supreme One came into his life and made him join the happy band of pilgrim saints. Oh! the wonder of it all!

PUNARCHI PATHU: 27. ODE ON FULFILMENT
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF FULFILMENT

This song of mystic union deals with the theme of the soul's longing for an inseparable reunion with the Guru in love and joy everlasting. In the previous lyric, Manivachakar sang on the wonder of his being enlisted into the society of saints by his Guru, who pointed the way of Truth to him, thereby saving him from the sufferings of the world. This

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element of wonder gives place in this lyric to an irresistible yearning for an inseparable communion with the object of eternal truth. "When shall I in mystic union join my peerless, perfect Gem?" is the refrain of the poet's quest at this stage of spiritual realisation, and this song belongs to the class of mystical poetry. The special form assumed by the consciousness of the mystic is the perception of an eternal principle with which the soul of man desires alliance.

"When shall I speed to the feet of the Lord,
He who is my precious nectar,
Who gave Himself to me, in mystic union?"

So sang Manivachakar, while St. Perialwar of 'Divya Prabandam' has expressed the same yearning for reunion in the following lines:

"I captured Thee and left Thee within my core;
And myself, I subdued and kept it within Thyself."

5. 4. 5.

The mystic consciousness of our bard trembles with love on the brink of infinity, for the union with the white radiance of Eternity. The message of this ode is that man's conflicts, tensions and futile efforts after transient pleasures could only be subdued, if he could attain his repose at the feet of the Lord; at this juncture Manivachakar is assailed by doubts and his questions enable him to clear the path leading to the advaitic union with the Lord.

"My Flawless Gem!
When shall I pine and melt before Thee,
Like the spring gasping its way from the depths
And adore Thee in mystic union?"

27. 2.

"Before the presence of Thy blessed saints,
When shall I tune my endless yearning to Thy symphony,
And with fragrant flower offerings attain Thy gracious Feet?"

27. 3.

"He whose light transcends word and content —
When shall I taste Thy ambrosial essence?"

27. 4.

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"When shall I extol His glory
And sing of His intimate revelations to me?"

27. 5.

"No longer able to endure the pain of separation,
When shall my overwhelming flow of love
Find consummation with the bliss of my flawless Gem?"

27. 6.

"With the petals of my destiny offered in worshipful love,
When shall I be in mystic union with Thee,
Oh, my peerless splendour divine!"

27. 7.

"When shall all my maddening acts of love,
Draw me to Thy golden effulgence in mystic union?"

27. 8.

"In sweet and endearing terms of affection
I'll praise Thee night and day, to attain Thy resplendent Feet
In mystic union, say when shall it be?"

27. 9.

"Thou the active first principle in the rhythm of life,
The primal source of the universe, ancient wisdom of the Gods,
Thou Brahmin sage, my Guru, when shall this self blossom
At Thy fragrant feet in mystic bliss, my matchless Gem?"

27. 10.

St. Manivachakar reveals the intimate relationship of the finite to the Infinite in the mystic language of love. The nature of the union is described in the imagery of love.

"Tears stream from my eyes and gush from the heart.
My frame shivers with the thrills of love
As I gaze at the sublimity of my sovereign Lord;
My voice falters, hands clasp adoringly,
My flower offerings quiver to deck Thy feet;
With such trepidations of love, am I drawn to Thee,
Oh Lord."

27. 7.

When the soul is in mystic union with the Eternal Love and Wisdom of the Lord, then the soul is not conscious of its separateness; distinctions one and all melt away. The

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highest truth of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy is contained in this Ode of crystallised poesy. When shall the soul sing, dance, dwell, cajole, caress, embrace, adorn, love, know and enjoy the bliss of Bliss? The answer to these several questions put by the saintly poet is that the soul of man shall be blessed with such ecstatic bliss, when it is under the sway of perfect love and wisdom. Only then can the soul enjoy the inseparable union with the Lord, the acme of perfection.

"Whether sitting, standing, lying, waking,
In laughter or tears, in praise or worship,
Whether performing in varying accents meet,
The soul shall submerge in dissolving love,
Seeing that holy Form, beauteous like sunset.
Steeped in serene joy, when shall I become Thine?
In Oneness mingled for e'er — say when?
In mystic union with my peerless gem.

27. 8.

VAALAA PATHU: 28. ODE ON THE BURTHEN OF LIFE
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE PATH TO REALISATION

The aspiration for mystic union which alone can open the doors of bliss, so finely delineated in the previous lyric, leads the saintly bard to shun all the dizzy allurements of this world. He prays to the Lord to free him from the world where cares abound. In the previous psalm he asks a series of questions, when he could be united to his flawless Gem, and the answer is given in this lyric. It is only when the ties of the world are reft asunder and the great call comes from the Lord, that the human soul can tread the way to release. Man must learn first to discipline himself from the burden of existence. The key to detachment is echoed in the refrain "Call me to Thee, for I have none but Thee" alternating with "I attach myself to none but Thee". It is a pledge of his eternal and undying love to the Guru and conveys the suggestion of a reverie.

As we read through this ode, we get the impression of the poet's steadfast faith in the unfailing support of the Lord who sought him once and showed him great love. What close intimacy existed between them is seen in these lines,

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which break upon the shores of our heart in convincing sincerity.

"I raise my complaint against Thee.
And I do so out of my love for Thee.
To guide and strengthen me is Thy duty.
Lo! I fall upon the thorns of life—
No more! Call me to Thee."

28. 3.

We see the poet surrendering his thoughts, his actions and life itself at the feet of the Lord. The way to the freedom of the spirit is through entire self-surrender. The Reality of the Eternal Truth streams through the objective and subjective plane of the poet's existence, and fills his whole being. Therefore he finds it irksome to lead a life apart from the light of 'Sivam'. Life does not consist entirely of what we see and hear and feel in the visible world which is undergoing change in time and space. It is continually touching an invisible world of eternal values. This life is eternal and blissful.

Manivachakar portrays his existence on earth as one that is always overshadowed by the lures of the deceitful senses, and he prays for divine Grace to lead him forward in the path of realisation. His child-like trust is so vividly brought out in this lyric. The saint alludes to his early struggles with his earthly master, the Pandyan king under whom he had served as the premier minister.

"Shall I bow down? Hail any one else?
Will I look to them for guidance?
Speak Thou my Lord and call me to Thee".

28. 10.

The child of God demands an answer and it reverberates from the Master's lips — "Come unto me". The spark of truthfulness throws a halo of beauty on this poem and makes this song breathe not of the joyless and weak pessimism, but of undying hope and trust in the supremacy of Grace. The poet's incessant call to the Lord is not the reaction of frustration or revolt against life, but is the outcome of his infallible faith in the Eternal.

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This Ode is not a paean on renunciation so much as a song of victorious living. It breathes the melody of buoyant surrender. There is no idea of world-weariness here as commented upon by some western critics. Instead of life-negation, there is life-affirmation. The purpose of life cannot be understood by the mastery over this changing world of ours, and the processes of life here with all its magnificent achievements. It is the glimpse into the invisible world of eternal values which can illumine the problems of human existence. To be in tune with the rhythm of this invisible world of light and truth and to experience it in its fullness, is the significant message of this poem.

With the strength of Grace, which St. Manivachakar invokes in the following poem on Grace, he hopes to achieve the mastery of life whereby the soul shall become purified from the "unwilling dross that checks its flight". Trust is a positive condition but because it is fixed on an Object which is beyond the range of human thought, negative terms are used to describe it. The focus is on realisation or fulfilment which is the ultimate goal of life. Life becomes purposeless *only* if we do not cling to His gracious Feet for support and guidance.

"Other than thy laudable Feet,
I know of no other refuge — Why?
Thou sought me out, Lord of Sivaloga,
Dweller in the shrine of Tiru Perunturai.
In love I chide thee now and bemoan.
Be it thy will to make me steadfast, or else
I faint. No longer can I bide here on earth.
Call me to Thee in Grace."

28. 3.

CHAPTER XXIII

ARUL PATHU: 29. ODE ON GRACE
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE PURIFYING PROCESS

'Grace' is the "Open Sesame" that opens the gates of divine happiness to the soul of man, and every seeker of God

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(Jivan-Mukta) attains his realisation through the silent working of the power of 'Grace'. The force of 'Grace' is manifested in the universe and in the heart of man. Its ways are mysterious, for like the wind it bloweth where it listeth. Manivachakar had prepared the ground by his child-like trust and the pledge of unswerving fidelity in the previous lyric on 'The Burthen of Life', for the current of Grace to flow freely into his life. Without the purifying force of Grace, the soul's journey to God would not be possible. He cannot see God by his own efforts even if he searches the whole world. He addresses with beseeching love, his master, the Lord of Perunturai to *continue* to feed him with the nectar of Grace, that he may for ever continue to love Him deeply and intensely, and push upward to the goal of the celestial mount of God, Kailas, the abode of Lord Siva. The refrain in this ode has a peculiar charm:

> "If I, thy bondsman, call on Thee most lovingly,
> Wilt Thou not assure me of Thy tender grace?"

It is indeed a significant appeal for greater purification in the path of self-realisation, a significant *call* of a significant *Jivan-mukta* for significant *living*.

In this lyric, the hallowed spot of Tiru-Perunturai is immortalised by our poet. In this sacred place, he saw his Guru who initiated him to the life of spiritual heritage. In this abode, His grace overpowered him with Love unconquerable, and it was the beginning of the purifying process whereby the soul from dense darkness became aware of the light of God. This was the blessed spot where the Lord with Arulsakhi (Grace) by His side appeared to him, under the Kuruntha tree and made him *"His Own"* and bade him sing his pearl drops, gems immortal and called him "Manikka-vachaka"! — the Poet of ruby utterance.

It was in this sanctuary that was revealed to him, the various immanent forms of God-head as well as His transcendent nature.

> "Thou, the light, Thou the Law,
> Thou the luminous wisdom, Thou the Truth"

as well as

> "Thou who has 'Gnanakothai' Sakti by Thy side,

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Whose countenance gleams with holy ash,
Thou who performeth the cosmic dance of life,
The Beloved of my life, who burnt the topless towers
of Tripura."

"Here in this place, I saw Thee as the flame
In the beauteous pond by the Kuruntha tree;
In this sanctuary saw the sight of Thy holy saints
Chanting Thy sacred scriptures and adoring Thy glory".

Finally he hails Perunturai as the blessed spot where his Guru pointed the way of Truth, the way of Love, and the way of Bliss to him, the lowliest of the low, out of his illimitable love and grace.

"In Perunturai, girt with stately avenues,
'Neath the Kuruntham's fragrant groves,
I call to mind Thy glories all and fondly yearn
For Thee, my mighty master and my Lord. Thus
Lifted by thy spell, when Thy bondsman calls,
Say unto me: 'From being tossed in the sea of Life,
Come hither to me, to the Celestial Mount, and see
The way of Truth'. Call me thus in tender grace".

29. 10.

TIRUKALUKUNRAM: 30. ODE ON THE EAGLE MOUNT
PLACE: TIRUKALUKUNRAM
QUINTESSENCE: THE VISION OF THE GURU

On the road to Tillai, it would appear that our pilgrim bard visited the Eagle Mount which is also known as Veda Giri — the Mount of the Vedas. Four hills cluster together representing the four Vedas with the central peak symbolic of the Lord Himself in the form of a "Lingam". This lyric makes significant reference to the reappearance of the Guru on the Eagle-Mount. "Thou showed Thyself upon the Eagle Hill". It is curious that in this poem, Manivachakar alludes to his conversion at Perunturai and also dwells pointedly on the vision of the Guru upon the Sacred Mount.

"In pretty Perunturai's precious boat,
I got in and steered the bark of Grace.
Oh, Thou who art invincible did come
And showed thyself upon the Eagle Hill."

30. 4.

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The bark of his life was tossed by many a storm after his conversion at Perunturai, and this second impact of his Guru strengthened the weary sailor. The poet does not tell us explicitly how the Lord showed Himself to him. It seems certain that the Guru did not come in human form as He did at Perunturai, because he has not described His appearance. It is possible that the Lord gave our bard the vision of His Sacred Feet — the source of divine Grace. The Poet describes his trials and afflictions after the crucial events of his great consecration at Perunturai. He compares his life to that of a pitiable fish, whose water habitats have been constantly changed, and by association evokes the compassion of the Lord at his own vicissitudes of life.

> "The tears of my life's sufferings were changed
> To tears of pure Love at Perunturai.
> Yet perplexed I became soon after, not knowing
> Where I could place those Gracious Feet —
> To save me from confusion sore, Thou came
> And showed Thyself upon the Eagle Mount."
>
> 30. 3.

We can humbly surmise that the Master illuminated Manivachakar this time by revealing to him the esoteric presence of His sacred feet in the innermost shrine of his heart. The poet thought that perhaps the scorn of the world was well deserved by him; even though the Guru had initiated him at Perunturai, yet his heart had not become pure. After much effort, he reached the Eagle Mount where the Lord gave him the vision of His abiding nearness. "Seek me not outside yourself, nor enshrine my symbols in temples or palaces but implant my sacred feet in the secret recess of your heart," seems to be the meaning of the context: "He showed Himself upon the Eagle Mount". In support of this interpretation, the poet makes a pointed reference to the Guru as his "matchless Gem set in the jewel of his heart", "En Chintai Vaitha Chikamani". 30. 5.

Manivachakar refers to the need for a radical change of heart. It will not do to abandon one form of life to another with an impure heart. "Like the rain-bearing cloud that changeth the salty waters of the sea into refreshing showers,

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the clouds of divine Grace changed my impious nature into holy love".

"In eager desire I continued
To chant Thy holy name,
And the world bore witness.
Lo! upon the Eagle Mount Thou came
And showed Thyself to me."

30. 5.

Like a chaste wife whose allegiance was fixed upon her beloved, so also our saintly poet's love was focussed on his Guru with single-minded devotion. His opponents ranged themselves against him with impious speech and deeds. He stood alone without even the company of the faithful ones who were with him for some time. With the sighs of imminent death, the poet calls upon his Guru to give him succour:

Before my foes, what did Thou do to me,
That I should feel so forsaken and withered?
Then all at once in great love I called Thee.
Thou camest and showed Thyself upon the Eagle Mount".

30. 6.

Manikkavachakar may be alluding in this poem to the derision of the world and the indignation of the King of the Pandyan kingdom when he relinquished his ministerial role at Perunturai's sacred abode. The vexed king had subjected him to severe trials for his failure to purchase the horses. When he appealed to his Guru not to forsake him, He vouchsafed His Grace in a tangible way at the Eagle Mount. This poem is significant for its autobiographical references as well as for the light it throws on the spiritual evolution of our pilgrim poet as he journeys to Tillai, the abode of the ineffable Fount of Wisdom and Light.

KANDA PATHU: 31. ODE TO TILLAI
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE DANCE OF SIVA

On the road to Tillai, the poet had to battle against fearful odds at his own lethargy, his doubts and despondency, the slur and stings of the world, the temptations of the flesh, but he had also his moments of buoyancy and enjoyable

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bliss as at the Eagle Mount and Tiruvannamalai. In this poem and in the lyric of Tillai (40) the poet comes face to face with the enchanting Lord of Tillai and beholds His mystic dance in the golden Hall at Chidambaram. The Songster of "ruby utterances" celebrates his great joy by contrasting his mute inglorious past with the triumph of the Lord's enlightenment of him and of His prophetic bidding "To Tillai, Go".

"A slave to the senses and heading towards death,
Restlessly I wandered midst encircling gloom.
My mind illumined, He enslaved me with radiant love.
His endless bliss, in beauteous Tillai I saw.

31. 1.

Enmeshed in the sorrow of birth and deeds,
With not a thought for Him, I lay aweary.
The peerless One in Grace bereft my bonds of birth;
He whom the worlds worship, in Tillai's Hall I saw.

31. 2.

Tho' I knew Him not, He mingled in my mind and will;
And in gracious Love changed my way of life to His.
The Lord of Tiruturuti's sweet blessedness, even I
In lowly meekness saw with joy at beauteous Tillai.

31. 3.

To me who am ignorant and poorest of the poor,
He came as the wise Guru that I may dwell in grace.
Before them all, He bereft the cords of bondage —
Him saw I too in Tillai's Hall where all adore.

31. 4.

In the whirlpool of stagnant values, tossed about
Helplessly, even I was rescued from life's anguish.
Purged of my estranged claims and egoistic vanity,
My flawless ambrosia, in august Tillai saw I too.

31. 5.

The Primal Lord of the World who transforms
Life, who banishes sickness, age and ties of kin;
I saw Him worshipped by vedic seers and devas,
In the sacred Hall of Tillai, girt with leafy groves.

31. 6.

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My crude ties and superficial loves He bereft,
And instilled in me a mania that I may not stray,
He bound me to His holy Feet by the cords of my *will*.
The Enlightened One's creative sport, in Tillai I saw.
31. 7.

Wrapt in endless conceits, in darkness I lay,
Unaware of the chain of actions, in abject futility;
Then He showered infinite bliss and subjugated me.
He whom heavenly hosts adore, I saw in Tillai.
31. 8.

My depraved self knew not the righteous code of living,
Yet He gave with unfailing Love, the light of wisdom
And transmuted my destiny by His bequest of grace.
Him whom the vedas extol, in Tillai's Hall I too saw.
31. 9.

In elements and senses five, in knowledge and substance too,
He pervades all diverse forms, tho' untouched by diversity:
The effulgent light, the lustrous gem that soothes,
Praised in scriptures, Him, I saw in renowned Tillai.
31. 10.

The poet gives us an appealing picture of himself before his initiation. He was ignorant and dense, whirled in the confusion of caste, creed and futile existence. He was a victim to age and disease, bound by the ties of kith and kin too. Egoism and delusion ruled him, and he was tossed by endless vicissitudes; he had the constant dread of the unknown future haunting him. He had not discriminated between right and wrong nor did he have any definite aim in life. This is generally true of the life of every man on earth though in this particular poem, the life of Manikkavachakar is specially alluded.

In working out the process of his illumination, the saint of Varthavur builds up his ideal of the Unity of life. From the complex diversity of this birth, the soul begins its ascent after its enlightenment, to the unity of Siva. The Grace of the Lord aids him on his perilous path. By devotion and love, he keeps himself steady in his pursuit.

"He Filled me with a frenzy of love.
He bound me to His Holy Feet.

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I was tied up like the meek cow.
Then the Lord fed me with the nectar of bliss.
He purged me from the strains of life.
He freed me from all afflictions.
Thus liberated, I've come to the Liberator
He who holds His mystic dance at Tillai."

He who is the diversity of life and who is beyond the comprehension of the mortals, is also the cosmic Dancer whom the bard sees in the House of Tillai. He is immanent in the phenomenal universe, in the minds and hearts of His devout saints, in all diverse forms as the *One* that remains, while the many change and pass.

In Tillai, Manikkavachakar beholds the unity of the Lord in his aspect of Ananda, the source of purest bliss unending. The light of perfect wisdom radiates from His beauteous presence; therefore the sages and Gods too revere the Lord of Tillai. His own joyful experience at Tillai is the award of his Guru's enlightenment at Perunturai. The abode of the Lord of Tillai signifies the highest illumination, for He is the source of the vedas, the activity of the world and the wisdom of the ages. We see the true lover of Siva (Siva bhakta) in St. Manivachakar in a mood of jubilation, as he reaches the abode of eternal wisdom, Tillai, the House of Bliss.

CHAPTER XXIV

PIRARTHANAI PATHU: 32. A PRAYER
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: A SUPPLICATION FOR EVERLASTING BLISS

This lyric is in the form of a tuneful prayer, a prayer for greater and deeper love for the Guru, so that an aspirant can enjoy the experience of everlasting bliss.

In the company of the saints, Manivachakar was perfectly happy after his initiation at Perunturai, but when they departed, he felt depressed and exhausted. His sensitive nature

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felt troubled at every passing set-back. He prays for the changeless love of the Lord. 32. 1.

"Let thy fountain of compassion overflow and mingle in the stream of my love." 32. 2.

"The Saints of God have been blessed with joy ineffable, while I am still dogged by the wearisome burden of existence. I pray for thy abiding Love." 32. 3.

The poet recollects with gratitude that the master came to him of his own accord, dispelled his gloom and placed him in the midst of his holy companions. He recovers from his temporary desolation and prays for a greater measure of strength to withstand all lesser distractions, in order to enjoy the all-sustaining Love divine. 32. 4.

St. Manivachakar believes that he can experience the fullest joy and swim freely in the sea of bliss only if he detaches himself from the desires of the body and annihilate the 'Ego'. The saint prays for the purification of his body and soul, so that he can taste the sweetness of His Love. 32. 5.

He prays for that sublime, immaculate Love experienced by the faithful saints of God. He was exiled from their company because he lacked it. So he appeals to the source of Love to grant him from His unfathomable sea, a measure of His eternal, inseparable, never forgetful, ever remembering, illimitable, and unfailing love infinite! 32. 6.

When a man does not make himself a fitting receptacle of Love, but depends superficially on the Lord's gracious munificence, he is sure to feel abandoned and suffer disappointment. "Ask and it shall be given" has been proved to be true by the worthy saints of God. He follows their technique and beseeches the Lord for greater illumination. 32. 7.

His state of mind is as hard and rigid like the bamboo, and like the moon, he wanes. So he prays for that steadfast love and tender devotion displayed by his faithful devotees. 32. 8.

"While Thy loving saints enjoy Thy bliss
So intimately and spontaneously,
Shall I bemoan as a stranger?

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Purify, exalt my consciousness,
That Thy exceeding love may ever be mine."

32. 9.

My sweetest fruit, if I remain an uncut gourd,
How will that enhance Thy glory?"

32. 10.

This prayer for Love destroys his sentimental illusions about the life of man on earth and pierces his cloudy desires and remorselessly dissects his thoughts.

In nothing is the strength of love more strikingly shown than in the power it has to change our motives for action, and also to create new capacities out of the waste lumber of half-formed desires, lukewarm ambitions and unused energies. Manivachakar contrasts his pitiable state of forlorn helplessness with the blessedness of the saints of God. He prays for the ineffable communion with Bliss, "When I can always be in unison with Thee in love and joy."

KULAITHA PATHU: 33. ODE ON DEDICATION
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: UNION IN LOVE

This hymn gives the very echo to the seat where Love is throned. It is a majestic song where the "soul of man and Love weep together". The soul of man bruised by the arrows of Love has been so minutely portrayed that every word tingles with the resonance of it.

"An erring and a contrite soul, Thou wilt not despise".

33. 1.

On a grinding stone, the sandalwood disc is revolved ceaselessly till the sandalwood paste is formed, and then the paste is offered to be churned in the heart of the lover of God. Emotional symbolism becomes the supreme shaping force in these lyrics.

"If Oppressed by evil, will Thou not save?
If I labour hard, is there any hope?
If I err, will Thou forbear?
If I call on Thee, will Thou withhold thy Grace"?

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The poet feels the burden of existence in the body and implores that, He who owns his soul should once again enslave him absolutely. He humiliates himself and exalts the magnanimous act of the Lord who turned the overflowing light of His Grace to radiate his soul. Should He not choose to transmute his Himalayan blunders into virtues, out of pity for him?

Dejection he feels all the more because having tasted the sweetness of love once, he is deprived of it. He could think of no possible return for the infinite mercies of the Lord. He feels benumbed by pain in mind and soul. Then the mood changes and he lifts his prayer from the plane of entreaty to that of complete self-surrender.

"Thou art my all—my fluent tongue and organs of thought,
My comfort Thou and trepidation; my power for good
and ill;
No other goal have I in life. Truly in adoring Thee
Lies the way to liberation. In my fearful moments
Oh Sivaloka, wilt thou not lend thy solace?" 33. 5.

The goal to the beloved is by way of entire surrender; the things of the world were excellent as far as they went, but when a man had learned that they could not give him satisfaction, then to renounce them in humility was the wisest course. Man's selfishness creates a fortress of desires, but in Manivachakar's case, his desire finds its centrifugal force in the Master Guru.

"Thou art the desirable acme of Wisdom.
All that we desire, Thou dost grant.
Yet art Thou aloof to Brahma and Mal
Who desired Thee. For my humble service
Thou did'st desire. In Thee was a desire
For me as was a desire in me for Thee.
If I should ever desire for aught,
E'en that 'll be to desire what Thou desireth".
33. 6.

The poet has reached a stage when he realises that man is for ever multiplying his desires and becoming more and more disconsolate, only to cry at last that all is 'Vanitas Vanitatum'. Therefore he urges that all our desires, our

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riches, love, power, body and soul should be surrendered to Him, not bitterly, not reluctantly, nay, not rebelliously, but joyfully. The sanctity of his detachment and renunciation is revealed in these verses. The Lord becomes the object of his impassioned desire and rooted thus, he asks triumphantly — "Is there any obstruction that can bar my way"? His soul having apprehended the nature of the Beloved, in absolute abandonment of desire, he makes a grand offering of himself. "I give my all to Thee. Henceforth I claim no prerogative over myself".

The beauty of his vision of Love is described in the surging chaos of the unexpressed.

"Thou who cannot be beheld by the human eye,
Thy gracious Feet, I beheld by Thy Grace,
And my eyes rained bliss sublime so that
Day and night on that alone I ponder".

33. 9.

The poet's vision suffuses and colours everything which he sees around him. They flash and struggle into utterance and we become conscious of the presence of a soul stricken with the Eternal Principle of Love, as we hear his fall of tears and requiems of lament. Our sense of awe and solemn pity is quickened as we hear him address the Lord in soul-melting language of Love:

"Oh Beauty so Fair! My puny self languishes
In mystic Love for thy Beauteous form".

33. 10.

UYIR UNNI PATHU: 34. THE LYRIC ON UNFOLDMENT
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE OFFERING OF THE SELF

The consecrated soul radiating the flame of love, addresses the Lord face to face.

"Thou who subdues my power of action!
Thou doth not part from me at any time".

34. 1.

To the question, how did He possess you, the saintly bard replies:

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"He *entered* my *heart, mingled* with my *life*
And for ever *dwells* in my *soul*."

34. 2.

It is against the background of this central experience that we should interpret the "living words" of Manikka Peruman and his actions too. When his 'ego' was vanquished by the act of Grace, in other words by the Guru's initiation, then stepped in the Lord to abide in him and the effect of his karmic deeds consumed, he was filled with an all-consuming love for the Eternal Light of God. Self-surrender, supplication, dejection and rapture are the outcome of this personal experience.

"I know myself no more; nor the recurrence of night and day.
He who is beyond the reach of human thought and speech,
He has maddened me with madness mystic".

34. 3.

He knew that life for him had ceased to flow in the accustomed channel as for the other human beings. He felt so because of the power of the Lord to exterminate his "accumulated actions", the karmic cycle of cause and effect. The Lord's Love not only pierced the exterior of his body, but percolated through the very marrow of his bones and melted them. The saint describes the nature of his dying to sense and self, and the subsequent tapping of the Lord in the subterranean springs of his own life. In this mood, he bids all those who seek the hidden treasures of the kingdom of Siva Nagar to come to him. He tells them of the efficacy of true Love and detachment.

"Non-attachment will straightway unite us
To the holy band of God's elect.
Ah, then Life's ego-centred delusive perplexities
Shall no more press upon me like the raging billows."

In this exalted state, the poet feels that he does not need anything in this life:

"Glory I ask not; nor desire I wealth;
Not earth nor heaven do I crave.
I seek not birth nor death. Nor the company

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Of those that deny my Lord Siva.
I have reached the sacred Feet of Perunturai.
I have adorned His Feet. I do not move from here.
I know no going hence again."

34. 7.

"Oh, precious Balm, distilled Honey,
What I need I know, but how much
I need, I yet do not know.
Verily in my mind, He has commingled
As life of my life, the Self of my soul".

34. 9.

We hear our pilgrim-poet singing deep in the being that has somehow stumbled into that impact with life that begets beauty; singing of the full tide of sublime Love as it encroaches, invades and finally possesses every corner and cranny of our being.

ACHAP PATHU: 35. ODE ON FEAR
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: ABSORPTION IN DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

In this ode, is enumerated all the fearful things, the saint will shun as a child of light. "I shall recoil from the ignorant and those who lack love, the impious and insincere seekers of the Lord. I shall dread the company of those who do not espouse His symbols as the holy ash, nor aspire steadfastly in all possible ways for His holy Love".

In contrast to these sources of fear, Manivachakar cites many instances where he would not exercise this dread. While he could not tolerate those who worship the false for the true, he would not have any dread of such things as life or death, desire or disease, the allurements of women or the scorn and infamy of the world, and the fury of the beasts and elements. He would not even fear the God of Death, Yama. The pilgrim saint was quite convinced that while he would not dread the unkind cuts of the world, he would abhor those unfaithful followers who shun the way of Light, Love and Truth. The recurrence of "I fear not" and "I fear", evokes the rasa of "Fear" by the harmony of opposites.

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TIRU PANDI PATIKAM: 36. ODE ON TIRU PANDI
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE GROWTH OF FELICITY

The question, "why fear the world"? leads Manivachakar to ponder on the central event in his life, when the Lord came to him as his deliverer and saved him from suffering. During this period of his life, he experienced felicity and contentment which find expression in each stanza of this poem. He alludes in the first stanza to the appearance of the Lord as a warrior on a fine charger to vindicate his honour before the Pandya King. He is filled with gratitude for this noble act of the Lord.

In the remaining stanzas, he addresses the human family and especially those who are of weak and wavering faith, to hasten and reach Him. Those who can abandon their self-centredness and follow His light, those who can forget their self-glory and be filled to the brim with His love — they are the true devotees of the Lord. In time of need, He would wage a holy war and confound the opponents of His devotees. He might come as a merchant, a teacher or a king and in whatever guise He appears, man must be ready to pay obeisance and love and receive His gracious gift.

This poem is full of allegorical suggestions and can be classified as an example of didactic poetry, where prominence is given to the spiritual truths of Saivism. The incidents in the poet's life when the Pandya King punished him for not purchasing the horses, when the Lord appeared as a warrior leading the array of horses and later allowing the river Vaikai to flood, are narrated in order to prove that the Lord's grace acts upon His true devotees in manifold ways. The ode ends with an appeal to the devout seekers of Truth, to throw aside all foolish delusions and to march bravely under the banner of the King of Kings.

"On the steed of illusion, He rides and gathers
His eager hosts; then shall cease life's fetters.
He grants grace unending, to those who refuge seek.
Draw nigh the beneficent King's Feet whose banner
proudly waves."
36. 7.

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CHAPTER XXV

PIDITHA PATHU: 37. THE LYRIC OF FLAMING LOVE
PLACE: TIRU TONIPURAM
QUINTESSENCE: COMMUNION IN DIVINE BLISS

After arduous wanderings and experiences, St. Manivachakar is in one of his exalted moods as he neared the city of Tiru Tonipuram. The poet of ruby utterances communicates his intimate relationship with the One, who is beyond the horizon of the mind's dominion. This lyric conveys the resolve of the saint to grasp tenaciously at the "pearl of great price". It had been his experience to find the pearl and then lose it. At the end of a weary search he finds again the precious pearl, so that his exultation knows no bounds and this poem is a hymn of victory.

There is a power in the soul which is linked to the infinite nature of Siva. Like the seed which is dropped into the ground and lost to view, even so, the soul takes its genesis from the essential nature of Siva. In the ripeness of time, it radiates the incomprehensible essence and then the soul conceives superintelligibly and beatifically. In that beatific mode, it holds tenaciously to the "Blessed Feet" and calls out:

"To Thee Lord Siva I hold fast,
Thou my wealth of Bliss".

The Lord is the all-pervasive splendour and the excellence of the mystic union. He is also like a delicious fruit which satisfies the hunger of a poor mendicant.

"To me who am starved in this world full of defilement,
Thou art the mellowing fruit, the healing balm
That cured me of my ailments and gave a new lease of life.
My divine physician has not only made me whole,
But also saved my family, nay, the whole of humanity.
My well-being most rare, my Lord Siva,
That we may live I hold fast to Thee.
How can Thou betake Thyself from me?"

37. 1.

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"Whatever false forms I espouse,
However beguiled I become,
My light of Truth, Supreme Lord of Gods!
That I may not sink in the gloom
So abysmal, oh, ocean of Love,
I cling to Thee for ever and ever.
Wherefore can'st Thou sever from me now?"

37. 2.

"My Mother, my Father, my peerless Gem,
Ambrosia that springs out of love's churns.
In falsehood thriving and tied to wheel of time,
I was amidst contamination sore.
But Thou did'st bestow on me such perfect bliss.
Oh my treasure, Siva my Lord,
My grip on Thee is irrevocable on earth.
Thou can'st not get away from me now."

37. 3.

Having escaped from the clutches of futility, from the incumbent weight of sinful existence, Manivachakar pictures himself as a child of Siva-Sakti, holding fast to the divine Mother and Father and beseeching them not to part from him.

"* . . . . . .
Oh wealth, which enriches the minds of
Thy discriminate 'elect' — Thy Saints.
In darkest gloom, I stretch out to Thee —
How can'st Thou separate from me now?

37. 4.

Incomparable One, that art the spark of my Soul,
Thou who lightened my path to the goal of Truth,
That I may shine in Thy Grace, in stress and strain,
My Peerless Love, on Thee I lean and cling.
Whither can'st Thou part from me now?

37. 5.

"* . . . . . .
Oh, beatific vision that I beheld!
Thy bondsman's fullness of bliss, Lord Siva,
In my final gasp, I shall not leave Thee.

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Wherefore can'st Thou disentangle from me?"

37. 6.

"Ancient Wisdom, that uproots the false sheaths
Of thy bondsman, that he may thrive in Thy Love.
Thou entereth my soul in response to my worship
And revealeth Thy beauteous Feet within.
My Sovereign Lord I cling to Thee,
How can'st Thou turn away from me now?"

37. 7.

"* . . . . . .
Oh maddening Mystic, Source of Life,
Protecting all and yet outside their orbit.
Thou elusive One, my tenacious grip is on Thee.
Whither can'st thou part from me?"

37. 8.

"Behold the mother's nourishing love for her babe!
Far greater is thy care for me, thy lost child.
Thy inflowing light doth melt my grossest nature
And floods my Soul with bliss ineffable.
Honied Sweetness that trails my life with joy.
Precious wealth, Siva my Lord
Close to Thee, for e'er shadowing, my hold is firm—
Whither can'st Thou wrench Thyself from me?

37. 9.

Alas! all of a sudden, the saint experiences his wealth of Bliss retreating. It is like the mother who leaves the child in the garden to play and vanishes from his sight to do her work. Then it is the child's turn to pursue the mother and having found her, he seeks refuge and repose in her. So too will St. Manivachakar pursue Him and having found His Lord, he will hold fast to Him. Never more can He forsake him.

The communicated experiences of poetry bear witness to a positive, creative aspect which the figure of a mother may possess within the inner life, mediating to the individual those social values which can be assimilated by his own nature. As to the child, the mother stands for all forms of the world's stored magic; so with the development of the inner life, these figures of the mother and child are charged with that same manna. It is the realisation of such a personal symbol

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that makes this lyric so entrancing. The mystical attribute, incomprehensible to the man of the world is simplicity to those who have put the world behind them. They have become as little children and the secrets hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes and are the common language of the nurseries of heaven.

In the closing stanza, we feel the pulse of rapture vibrate "within and without" the saint. We are presented with a vista vision of beauty and devotion, whereon he who gazes faints, entangled in its spell.

> In every pore of this frame, Thou infused Thy thrill
> And canopied it, as 'twere a golden temple.
> Thy artless coming melted my bones and subdued me.
> Oh sovereign Lord, my flawless gem!
> Suffering, birth, death and delusion, all ties
> Of life, Thou expunged, oh luminous Light!
> My Soul's bliss! tenacious is my hold on Thee—
> How can'st Thou ever betake Thyself from me?
>
> 37. 10.

TIRU VESARAVU: 38. A DITTY ON RECOLLECTION
PLACE: TIRUVIDAIMARUTHUR
QUINTESSENCE: ELIMINATION OF OBJECTIVE REALITY

The poet's soul no longer feels a prisoner in the body. Having communed with the untarnished glory of the supreme light, it too partakes of its essence. Manivachakar never gets tired of looking back to the great event of his life, when the Grace of the Lord flowed into his heart — his initiation and consecration by the Guru.

Before the wakening light stirred him, he was bound up in the fetters of worldliness. Then the Lord revealed to him. His Holy feet. It was like giving a dog, a golden dais. He reviewed his life, past and present, and was filled with holy sadness at his utter worthlessness. There is sadness without anguish, born of gratitude and love.

We get a glimpse of the saint after his consecration. He has wandered from place to place in the highways and by-ways chanting the name of Siva, and growing in beauty and stature by sipping the fragrant waters of His Grace in the fullness of realisation.

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He ends the canto with this memorable gem:

"Did I perform any worthy acts of worship?
Did I merit initiation of *"Sivayanama"*?
Like honey, nectar sweet, my blessed Siva
Of his own accord came, entered my soul
And bequeathed his serf, the legacy of Grace.
This bodily existence, from that day, I loathed.

38. 10.

We are reminded of what Browning says in Paracelsus:

"I knew I felt (perception unexpressed),
Uncomprehended by our narrow thought
What God is, what we are,
What life is — how God tastes an infinite joy
In infinite ways. One everlasting bliss.
All power proceeds from whom all being emanates".

TIRU PULAMBAL: 39. A DITTY ON SACRED LAMENT
PLACE: TIRU ARUR
QUINTESSENCE: THE RIPENESS OF EXPERIENCE

This canto consists of only three verses. The poet assures his own self that he will praise none but the Lord, and having seen Him once, he would always invoke Him. He conveys the sweetness of his enjoyment of the Lord's grace in this stanza:

"I seek not kith or kin; place or name I prize not.
The wise, no more do I desire, nor knowledge —
Lord of Kuttalam! Thy beauteous feet I seek,
Like the mother cow yearning for its calf".

39. 3.

CHAPTER XXVI

KULAA PATHU: 40. HYMN TO GOLDEN TILLAI
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: UNINTERRUPTED ENJOYMENT

Manivachakar's calm serenity which followed the vision of the Lord of Tillai is communicated in each of the ten verses in this hymn, which reminds us of Arnold's prayer

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"Calm soul of all things. Make it mine
To feel, amid the cities' jar
That there abides a peace of thine
Man did not make, and cannot mar".

Manivachakar, the perfect yogi with the loin cloth and begging bowl, after his wanderings far and wide had settled down at Tillai, in unintermittent enjoyment of the *Reality*.

The saint proclaimed the vision of His gracious Feet which he saw at Tillai, as the highest experience of life. In these stanzas we see the beauty of a pure soul, who bereft of sorrows and differentiation of good and bad, lives the life of sanctity, beneath the sanctuary at Tillai.

I have attached myself to the Lord of Tillai
In inseparable union.

40. 2.

My past bonds dissolved, present perplexities effaced,
And future ills eased, the Lord of Love,
He who dwells at Tillai has drawn me to Him.

40. 3.

This is the place where we learn
The goal of bliss. In chastened thought
Draw I nigh unto the Lord of Tillai.

40. 4.

Sipping His honied grace, I have attached
All that I am to the Lord of Tillai,
He who endows discrimination.

40. 5.

In all the different stages of his life,
Man must seek the source of Reality.
Thus am I drawn to the Golden temple at Tillai.

40. 6.

When he placed his Feet on my head,
The unreal attachments of life fled from me
And I've clung to the joyous Lord of Tillai.

40. 7.

The senses five ceased their tyrannical hold on me,
As I beheld His benign Grace
And I drew nigh to the Lord of Tillai.

40. 8.

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In the barren field of my existence,
I came across the hidden treasure of His Grace.
Thenceforth I served none but the Lord of Tillai.

40. 9.

In Tillai I perform my ministrations with equanimity,
Where the good and evil deeds of mine are abolished;
Herein I have found Him as tender as a mother."

40. 10.

Before the illuminating light of Tillai, the Saint sings these songs of repose, and such overflowing peace fills his soul. Tillai, the Home of Joy, becomes dynamic with the aura of peace and wisdom.

ATPUTHA PATHU: THE MIRACLE ODE
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE WONDER OF THE EXPERIENCE

Manivachakar recalls the miraculous experience of his spiritual conversion. The Guru came into his life at a time when he least expected Him. As a young minister of state, he was under the thraldom of the 'Ego' and the senses five; he was a victim to inordinate desires for all the fleeting and ignoble things. The burden of his ministerial duties weighed on him and he regarded the phenomenal as the real, steeped as he was then in the web of delusion's mire. That was the time when his Guru appeared. "He found that I was bitten by the poisonous snake of Egoism and was reeling under its sway. The Lord took pity on me and subdued my uncontrollable passions and ties. Then He fed me with the manna that cured me of all ills." 41. 3.

"He came and Lo! I awoke, disturbed
From the caresses of women, to find myself
In the endearing clasp of Siva-Sakti.
In Grace my dearest Helper made me His.
The miracle of Love, I know not, not I."

41. 4.

The poem celebrates the miracle of the Lord's overwhelming influence on the poet at Tirupperuntural. "He came, He came and relieved him of his mountain load of miseries.

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Oh! the exceeding wonder of his cure!" These verses reveal more of his early life than any other songs, and is a thanks-offering for his final deliverance from sensual thraldom. He celebrates the coming of his loving Guru whose feet have crowned the suppliant's head and he relishes the first glad surprise of his freedom. "Such miracle of Grace I know not — not I."

SENNI PATHU: 42. ODE ON SALUTATION
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE CERTAINTY OF BLISS

In this canto is worked out in detail, the ideal of the divine teacher or Guru.

The Lord is praised as Ananda, Beauty, Blissful Love and Truth, upon whose flowery feet, the crown of our head shall rest in repose. The songs breathe of the *certainty* of bliss. The saintly lover in the role of a lady-love dwells on the charms of her Beloved, and shares with her companions the secret of how her Lord had stolen away her heart, so that in sadness, her bangles have become loose by pining for him.

"In Perunturai He came surrounded by his devotees like a Brahmin Guru; in Tillai, He showed me His cosmic Dance in the assembly of His saints and then He made my heart His home and claimed my services. Why did He reveal in this manner?" 42. 4.

"He destroyed my power for evil, granted me piety and showed the *Way* to contact the *Real*. He gave me the boon of fellowship with the true saints of God. I too prayed that I should for ever enjoy the association of the devout, holy men of God." 42. 7.

"When the Guru sighted my horizon and *called me unto Him* — the certainty of bliss unfailing was assured." It is this secret that he wished to communicate with all seekers of Truth.

"Upon His Roseate Feet, our Heads shall
Repose and blossom forth."

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TIRU VAARTHAI: 43. ODE TO THE HOLY WORD
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: UNDERSTANDING LOVE

It gives great joy to Manivachakar to feel that the Lord not only vouchsafed His grace on him alone, but on all those who sought His Love. Illustrations of His Grace are freely drawn from the Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam. Love is the surest means of attaining His Feet. Where there is Love, grace will flow and the beatific vision, the Reality, can be known and enjoyed. Such understanding Love will eliminate all doubts of multiplicity and one can see the unity in the midst of diversity. The holy word of God can be heard only *by* His grace and through our Love. The refrain "They who know His nature, His ways, worth, deeds, power and grace shall gain communion with our sovereign Lord" is resonant with the understanding Love of a Siva bhakta.

ENNA PATIKAM: 44. LYRICAL REVERIE
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE EXTINCTION OF DESIRE

In this lyric is communicated the joy of communion with the holy saints of God. Having seen the beatific vision, Manivachakar feels intensely that he cannot endure any more separation from the Lord. This intense yearning for spiritual reunion with the One infinite Self, can only be assuaged by dwelling on the blissful enjoyment of his initiation by the Guru and recalling the experience again and again in an intimate and abundant fashion.

The mingled feelings of his ingratitude and unworthiness pitted against the greatness of the Guru, the cherished object of his love, give rise to the poignant appeal expressed in this reverie. The last stanza gives an assurance of the certitude of God's infinite mercy and the poet's reconciliation that all things work for good to them that love God. Then the saint soars on the wings of pure contemplation, and the activity of the senses becomes stilled. The extinction of desire is complete. The essence of his life merges into the infinite Essence of Life.

He proclaims that his eyes see no more! — Love's illumination is so intense that all differences and divisions get

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merged in the light of contemplation and there lies the secret of the Jivan Mukta's *realisation*.

"My eyes see no more Thy Gracious feet;
No adoration raise I from my lips—
No worship do I perform, neither do I cherish Thee.
Self-knowledge has gone out of me.
To enjoin Thy holy saints, I've no desire;
With my ignoble senses, I've ceased to act;
Even if Thou should'st come to me, my master,
I should feel bashful to look on Thee." 44.

CHAPTER XXVII

YAATHIRAI PATHU: 45. THE SONG OF THE PILGRIMS
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE CALL TO THE WORLD!

In the joy of contemplation and with the certitude of the Lord's infinite love, Saint Manivachakar is filled with a holy desire that the struggling humanity too should make their ascent to the "city of God". So far we have followed the bard as a pilgrim of an inward Odyssey. At Tirupperunturai, his master's grace flowed into his soul and on the Road to Tillai, he speaks of the sense of the "divine presence" seen at the Eagle Mount. In a state of exalted happiness, he became "a mode of the infinite" at Tillai, and was filled with an abounding sense of the divine life and of the reality within him as THAT, underlying the phenomenal universe. He wished to communicate this revelation to the world of men; hence his call in this poem to all who seek the joyous release, to join him in the great pilgrimage. His Quest has ended in Conquest and he wants all to follow him. With what tenderness does he rally the still sad forces of humanity to free themselves from the havoc of their own ruination and afflictions of life. "It is time", he says so touchingly, "that we abandon the falsities of life and betake ourselves to the refuge of His Holy Feet. The compassionate radiance of His Grace bubbles in foaming whiteness in

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the core of our little emotional wells and should we not well up in love and yearning and speed to the Source of our Being — all of us jointly?" 45. 1.

The journey to God should be undertaken in a true spirit of detachment and contemplation, in the company of the tested and truthful devotees. Those who pursue the goal steadfastly should not falter at any stage of the journey, nor halt because of their weakness. "In Him lies our strength and the self realises the SELF. In a beautiful stanza, he describes the nature of the true "Bhaktas", devotees of the Lord.

"They are self-possessed, with no ties binding them:
Guided by their own inner light, they are their own masters.
Oft they ask, 'Who are we? What is ours?' Away with desires!
Illusion all! and so vanquishing the 'Ego',
Join ye the holy band of saints of the King —
Realise that in His Will lies the true goal of Life.
Relinquishing all that is false and unreal,
Be ye ready to follow the light that gleams
From the beatific Feet of the Lord of Tillai."

45. 3.

In the answer to the question, 'who is dear to the Lord and Master?' we find the poetry and philosophy of Tiruvachakam, the Testament of Love and Beauty epitomised:

"He is dear who annihilates the Ego and tunes his will to His Love.

Desire and indignation completely abandoned, these pilgrim-seekers

Should get ready immediately, for there is not much time left on earth.

Adorable are those men of God who surrender their will to His Will in peace.

If they do not hasten, the gates of Sivapuram might be shut 'ere they reach there."

45. 5.

We are reminded of Tennyson's lines:

"Oh, let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now".

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Manivachakar's love for humanity flows freely in these songs. He is impatient with those who waver and loiter. "Let those loitering people stay on, but we shall proceed, away from the fleeting world." 45. 7. "We shall reach 'Sivapura' (city of God) while the gates are yet open." 45. 8. How shall we proceed on our journey?

"We shall sing, and adore Him with all our hearts
And offer Him the blossoms of our Love.
No barriers shall hinder our happy way,
And afflictions we shall not despise."

45. 6.

St. Manivachakar reiterates his faith that the joys of fulfilment can best be anticipated by chastening the mind with pure thoughts, exalting our Love for Him and being in tune with His Will. 45. 9.

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall realise
perennial Bliss."

At the journey's End, there awaits the glorious consummation.

"Ye shall taste to the full the nectar of Grace,
And filled with love exceeding, ye shall immerse
In the Ocean of Bliss".

45. 10.

All ye who prize this goal, arise and heed the call of Manivachakar, the inheritor of Siva Rajya, for he awaits us round the hidden corner. Join him in the mighty procession to the city of Siva. The way is trackless but with Manikkanar, the Guide, all will be well.

TIRU PADAI ELLUCHI: 46. THE BATTLE MARCH
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE WAR AGAINST THE EVIL FORCES

The General — our Saint of Vathavur — had in the last ode prepared humanity for the march. Here the clarion sounds to alert these warriors to take up arms against the forces of ignorance. In these two stanzas, poetry resorts to allegory. The holy veterans who are composed of pious devotees, loved disciples, yogis and mystic apostles don themselves with the armour of Righteousness, Wisdom, Purity

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and they guard the heavenly fortress against the forces of illusion and suffering.

TIRU VENBA: 47. THE HOLY LYRIC
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE NATURE OF LIBERATED SOULS

Ever since the Lord 'pierced him with the arrow of realisation' and awakened his inner eye, Manikkavachakar was able to realise that the divine grace was the greatest panacea against the miseries of Life. He traces the stages of God Realisation. The soul gets diffused with the light of the Lord, the kindly shepherd who leads His flock to Mukti, from where there is no return.

The unparalleled gift of His love is the privilege of a holy man of God whose heart is the holy of holies for the Lord. The transfigured saint is full of gratitude at the infinite showers of grace from the source of Ineffable Bliss:

> "The Lord of Perunturai has made my heart
> His abode, and lighted it with Love.
> His coming has cleft sorrow's bonds
> For ever, and banished darkness from my ken.
> What perfect bliss I experience".
>
> 47. 11.

PANDAAYA NAANMARAI: 48. THE ANCIENT SCRIPTURE
PLACE: TIRUPPERUNTURAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE AFTERMATH OF EXPERIENCE

Who made me a Jivan Mukta? How did I journey from the unreal to the Real? The saint attributes all that he is, to the working of the potent force of the Grace of God; it has been elusive to the devas, and the scriptures could not define it, but it has been easily accessible to him. The 'bhava' of gratitude is predominant in this poem. References are freely made to the incident of the Lord riding on a charger and in all probability these two lyrics were composed on Manivachakar's return to the haven of Tiruppertunturai after relinquishing his ministerial duties. The cantos express his deep gratitude and his unswerving allegiance to the Guru for alleviating his sufferings under the Pandya King.

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He praises the Lord's sacred abode of Tirupperunturai, the place of his liberation, the centre of worship for pious householders, saints, sages and devas. Exerywhere he turns, he sees His glory shining in this universe.

> "He is the goal of Thought, Knowledge Absolute.
> He transcends the beauteous spoken word and yet by uttering 'Perunturai', I'm released from my births. His Healing Feet, I placed them in my soul.
>
> 48. 7.

Thus we see that by chanting His praise in gem-like utterances, Manikka Peruman attained the illumination that radiated from the 'flawless gem".

CHAPTER XXVIII

TIRU PADAIAADCHI: 49. THE TESTAMENT OF ATTAINMENT

PLACE: TILLAI

QUINTESSENCE: THE BLESSEDNESS OF BLISS

In the experience of Siva's final manifestation, St. Manivachakar apprehends the Truth of Oneness. *He is all that is.* The poet has released himself from the world of images, and beckons us to do likewise; he does not shrink from the world of woes and delights as in the days of yore; he does not shun the world as a fearful place nor does he ignore it as a mirage. The One remains; the many change and pass away.

> "He sees it all the time as that which it is".
>
> 48. 6.

All the time-forms that change in the process of the cycle of 'becoming', gain a new meaning and a new dignity which without the vision of the Real, it could not have. This is the revelation of Reality which Manikkavachakar evokes in this "Song of Attainment".

It embodies the highest consummation of Manivachakar's enjoyment of bliss, to experience that all things in their time-illusion, events in life as well as problems of life, have to

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be viewed in the *light of the Eternal*. Behold the vision of the transfigured saint! Bereft of the corruptible and mutable nature, infused with bliss ineffable, gleaming in effulgence, he stands suffused with Love! The Lord of Perunturai had taken His abode in the temple of his heart, and had led him to Tillai, where he viewed the whole world as the abode of the Lord of Tillai.

Now, before the Lord of Tillai, Manivachakar testifies to the vision of Reality. Ugliness, suffering, desire, disharmony, meaningless rituals, external modes of life and philosophies, the good and bad, love and hate, 'the one in the many', the true and the false, and a myriad such interplay of opposites exist for us as long as we see the world as an objective duality, and as long as we see the multiplicity of things in the world in isolation. The moment we can see the objects, events and attributes of the world as the expression of Reality, the eternal meaning of the thing in itself is revealed through its appearance in the world.

In this lyric, we see the phases of sensual pleasures, and the passing pageant of delight and distress in the light of the eternal. In that light, there can be no differentiation between ugliness and beauty. They all share the grandeur of eternal Reality. "All things had put their evil nature off," as Shelley uttered in Prometheus Unbound, "with the fall of Jupiter, King of Illusion". This canto of Attainment may be said to contain the quintessence of Tiruvachakam. The purified soul in its arduous ascent has gained the eye of wisdom to see things without the distinctions of "like and dislike", "I and mine". In this unfathomable light of faith, man sees the world as it *is*. Faith makes us of multitudinous knowledge ignorant, of multitudinous will without volition, in multitudinous form unshapen.

In "the song of Attainment" is a heaven in which many different stars shine. In it shines the intellectual and moral excellences; in it shines all the 'lakshna' of good poetry instilled by the purest emotions of love and bhakti. In it shine the eternal verities of Knowledge, Truth and Bliss. The radiance of Reality illumines the God-head (Pati), soul (Pasu) and universe (Pasam) and Manivachakar sheds a

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halo of expectancy in this testament on the fulfilment of 'Para Mukti' or 'Eternal Bliss' by a 'Jivan Mukta' or a liberated soul.

"Lord, in thy Light, shall we see Light?"

This is the meaning of the refrain in each stanza, that the Lord has taken possession of his inner being.

Birth and death, change, decay and attachments that cause suffering, all things of the earth bound by time, space and causation in which man lives, moves and has his being, the melodious songs and dances, the play of the elements five, the confusion of 'right and wrong', 'I and mine', the enjoyment of His tender love and limitless Grace, the anxieties to perform rituals and cling to the symbols of worship, the yearning for the associations of the goodly saints of God, his entrancing love, like a love-lorn damsel for the sweet Beloved — all this pageant of life floats before the Saint's inward eye and assume a joyful significance, suffused in the unifying radiance of eternity. "Shall it not be so, when the life of my life, my dearly loved Beloved, takes his abiding place in my soul?" The question, "shall it not be?" implies the answer in the affirmative — "It shall be so."

The soul of the liberated Jivan Mukta is in a state of transcendent vitality, as it is *about* to enter the serenity of bliss eternal. In the immediacy of this attainment of fulfilment, Manikka Peruman breathing in the atmosphere of infinity looks tenderly with a soul melting with love upon the world he is about to bid farewell, and communicates to them the bliss in store for the liberated Jivan Mukta. And at the same time, he reviews all his past efforts to attain His Beatific Feet, so that the seekers after him may also follow this wondrous WAY OF LIFE. The communicated joy is something akin to what Beatrice tells Dante from Paradise with the river of light flowing before her:

> "I am made such by God in His Grace
> That your misery does not touch me;
> Nor the flame of this burning assail me."

Man may yet be in the presence of the Lord and behold under the form of eternity, the *true essence of life*. This complete yet impersonal joyful return of experience partakes

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of the nature of the "Fulfilment", which St. Manivachakar conveys in this song of songs.

This is the state that Tirumular (1474) pictured in Tirumantram, when he said that in the blossomed lotus Heart of the realised soul, springs up the fragrance of the Real One, the impartible parts of the One only Siva who is without a second. The Kriya-Jnana is the seeking of liberation; the Yoga-Jnana is the shining light coming from Nadanta, and the true state of Jnana is the state of denying, "I" and "Mine". Tirumular summed up this kind of experience in the following stanza:

"I learnt the object of my union with the body.
I learnt of my union with the God of Gods.
He entered my heart and became part of me;
I learnt the knowledge that knows no evil".

In the following memorable stanzas, St. Manivachakar soars to ineffable heights of divine Love and attains the peace, perfect peace that passeth understanding.

"My eyes shall gladden at the sight of His Feet —
Aye, shall it not be?
My life may in fulfilment be like that of the fair virgins,
Aye, shall it not be?
The succession of births on earth shall in oblivion pass —
Aye, shall it not be?
The blessed Feet unknown to Mal, shall I adore —
Aye, shall it not be?
And learn to sing and dance in tuneful melody sweet —
Aye, shall it not be?
And extol the heroic exploits of the forces of the
Lord of Pandi.
The 'Visionary' powers that gladden the devas shall be
sighted —
Aye, shall it not be?
If He who casts the net — the Hunter — comes to me
in revealing light.
49. 1.
The One with one, and five with five shall cease to combine —
Aye, shall it not be?
We shall seek to live as the faithful of Thy faithful ones —

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Aye, shall it not be?
We shall overflow with the milk of love as the cow
for its young.
Aye, shall it not be?
The mind — its thoughts and qualities — shall be rooted
in the Real —
Aye, shall it not be?
The impact of 'good and ill' shall cease —
Aye, shall it not be?
We too shall aspire to join Thy faithful saints,
Aye, shall it not be?
And yearn to relish that sweet ambrosia, which we prize —
Aye, shall it not be?
If He who holds the bull, my eternal Beloved
Who enslaved me were to come into my essence!

49. 2.

The many offshoots that spring from desire shall wither
away,
Aye, shall it not be?
In the purified consciousness shall enter my Beloved —
Aye, shall it not be?
The Endless and Indivisible shall be encompassed within us —
Aye, shall it not be?
The Effulgence that shines from Time's beginning shall be
our light,
Aye, shall it not be?
The afflictions that arise from alluring Love shall be
dispelled,
Aye, shall it not be?
The pang of existence that shadows mortals shall no
more sting —
Aye, shall it not be?
If my dearly loved Beloved were to encounter me."

49. 3.

Thus through the incantation of divine music, the above ode seems to gather up the significance of the saint's experience into a "single flame of consciousness."

The rapture of wordless, resoundingly sweet music, the experience of enjoying uninterruptedly the light of His Love

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within his heart, the yearning for the sole possession of this unity of truth, the jubilation in His wondrous revelations, and seeing Him in visions and for ever in pursuit of the knowledge of Siva's eight-fold divine attributes — these were his techniques to attain the excellence of bliss and for which he strove incessantly; and now he was leaving behind all these ineffectual searchings to enter the perfection of ineffable bliss.

In this lovely canto, the poet sweeps through the gamut of his life on earth, his upward Ascent as well as the expectancy of bliss that awaits him, and in this beatific state, he discovers that supreme unfoldment, attainment and complete cessation of experience are one. In this blessed state, the white radiance of ecstatic bliss streams unchecked, and the riddles of life unburden themselves of their mystery.

The music and the poetry of that classic philosophy embodied in Siva-Jnana-Botham, we get in Tiruvachakam. The divine love (para-bhakthi) is based on the soul's recognition of the non-duality and of its debt of Grace to the Lord. The Lord in 'advaita' with the soul, enables it not only to know external objects but also to know itself and Him.

The hymn is undoubtedly the purest expression of a saint of God on self-realisation, and of his moving, farewell message to the world. After wearisome toils through mortal coils, the young, wise, devout minister of state to the Pandyan King has changed his garb of mortality and donned on the vesture of highest wisdom and eternal love. We almost hear the pealing of heavenly bells that he has attained. No longer is he the bondsman addressing the master in fearful terms; nor is he the loving maiden complaining to her beloved; here is a liberated saint (bhakta) in the midst of other faithful saints, in the immediate presence of his supreme Father and Mother, and who at the same time has not forgotten his labouring fellowmen in the world. Distinctions fade away for he seeth his Beloved everywhere:

"Whatever the eye seeth is Thou.
Whatever the hand doeth is Thy worship

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What the mouth uttereth is Thy praise.
The earth, the elements and all living things —
These are all Thy gracious forms, O Lord".

Manivachakar's experiences in the world are so inspiring, that at the close of his hymn, we exclaim "Tis indeed a beautiful, wonderful world which means well and intensely". The expectation of the Bliss unutterable of a realised saint can only be felt and not expressed.

ANANDA MALAI: 50. THE GARLAND OF JOY
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: COMMUNION DIVINE

In the 'Testament of Attainment', we enjoyed the unfoldment of a Siva-bhakta at the summit of wisdom. Every line of that poem vibrated with the rhythm of contentment underlying the ideal of a realised Jivan-mukta. Fully immersed in the sea of light, the saint extolled the power of the Truth of God as proclaimed in the Vedas and radiated in the lives of the saints and seers.

In the last two cantos of Tiruvachakam, Manivachakar communicates to us the incommunicable bliss of *Love*, in the language of earthly experience as well as by autobiographical glimpses. That there is joy in *Wisdom* and *Truth*, he conveys to us in plain poesy. That there is infinite bliss in *Love*, he conveys in intangible strains that defy analysis. The repetition in his poetry of his quest in life, ending in the conquest of Love at Tiru Perunturai and Tillai, serves to lift the readers out of their narrow domestic walls and make them *see*, *feel* and *relish* the rasa of Love consummating in Peace (Santi). Thrice blessed are they who can experience the bliss of Love, not in isolation but in communion, in unison with the holiest devotees of the Lord. The last two cantos in Tiruvachakam breathe of this Sweet Content of calm serenity.

In these stanzas, the poet's gaze, as if it were his farewell gaze, is turned on the throbbing humanity and he identifies

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their whispering hopes and hushed fears as his own. He plunges into the depths of the madding crowd's ignoble strifes and fans the flame of divine love that shall not be quenched by any earthly fire. From the pinnacle of Truth from where he sang the song of Attainment, he urges his brethren in the world to follow the royal Way of Love. That had been his Way too and he unravels from his own precious ball of experience, the tortuous yet joyous skeins of Love, and we see him in the process of offering another fadeless garland of Love at the altar of his Master. That all men should taste the divine nectar of love was his greatest aim on earth.

In lines of poignant sweetness, he asks his fellow men to discipline and chasten their mode of living so as to overcome all material impediments that stand between them and their Great Beloved. The idea of inexorable fate, 'Praraptha-vinai', should not stifle man's activities on earth. All obstacles should be surmounted by immense faith and fearlessness. In this poem, St. Manivachakar exhorts man to follow his innate desire for mystic union. His impact with the world of matter cannot bring him lasting happiness. That the self must unite with the SELF, is told in moving strains of poesy in which joy and pathos are inextricably blended.

The title of the poem as the 'Garland of Joy' seems at first inconsistent to the reader who finds in it the saddest expression of a yearning for the everlasting union of human Love with divine Love, inconceivable by human intellect or mortal experience. It baffles us why the saint should end his divine poem on a note of intense longing! So real to him has been the bliss sublime, that he cannot but pity and sorrow for every man, millions of men and us all to whom it seems so far away. He speaks in the first person and in the language of the concrete, on the revels of Joy divine that await us round the corner, if only we are prepared to go his Way.

Powerless is the kingdom of the mind of man, as puny as his physical world, when compared with the dynamic realm of the soul that is kindled by love. All those bhaktas who espoused the path of Love had attained communion by self-surrender and faith. Man must learn to analyse his

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'self' and push forward to the goal fearlessly. Once he has shed his grossness and littleness, he becomes filled with a holy love to unite with the eternal One. All other longings of man spell desire and disaster.

"The fault is mine, Oh Lord, for not being able to assimilate Thy Love. It is not Thy lack of Love but mine that had caused me to linger long in the puppet shows of the world. Thou came nigh to me in love, dispelled my doubts and showed me the path from where no sojourner ever takes rebirth. My precious Master, if I am doomed to go through much suffering, is there no way to put it out? Put out the dimming glare so that out of the gloom, I may arise now and greet Thy bloom. Else of what use is the prospect of some distant gain? Where is Thy justice, law and order that safeguard shivering mortals from dire calamities?" 50. 1. 2. & 3.

These were the chords resounded by the poet to awaken us out of our sense slumber. "No more needless lethargy, O crown of creation! Listen to the panacea". So pipes our saintly bard. A child's appeal always moves the heart of a mother to tender compassion. So Manivachakar bids us plead with our divine Mother. "If she does not suckle us, shall we not become weaklings and perish? Oh mother, bestow thy loving care over us as we seek the solace of thy refuge. Turn us not away. Once thou did'st show us thy grace, and now is there no place for us?" 50. 5.

If man batters at the door of Love ceaselessly, crying for liberation and union, the Lord cannot hide Himself. "Shall He not say 'Fear not my child,' and extend the shelter of His Love? There is the Lord who holds his mystic Dance at Tillai, and whose primary purpose is to heed to the cries of His children in their tense moments of pain and woe." 50. 6. What a comforting message does Manivachakar immortalise in the closing songs of His great Poem! The Lord of Tillai, He who is the peerless splendour 'Paranjothi', the smile of the universe, will reveal His mighty Love to any man who calls on Him. The transfigured man in turn tries to uplift his fellowmen by the call to love and be loved.

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ACHOPATIKAM: 51. THE LYRIC OF RELEASE
PLACE: TILLAI
QUINTESSENCE: THE ACME OF BLISS

The last lyric in Tiruvachakam is a song of deliverance. The ideal of "Mukti" is delineated in matchless poetry. It provides also the key to the Buddhist Nirvana, to the Christian and Muslim Kingdom of Heaven, to the Zoroastrian Light and to the principle of Taoism.

It is at once a looking back and forward, up to infinity and down to earth, on the Supreme One and His manifestations in the universe and in MAN. Manivachakar draws aside the veil of eternity and sees the Beauty of Love, not as Arjuna saw it as the Power of Powers stupendous in vision dazzling the eye of man, but as the infinitesimal atom of Love permeating every action (Kriya) every thought (Jnana) and every rasa-feeling (Icha) of the visible and invisible Universe in its constituted Tamasic, Rajasic and Sattvic states.

The Beauty of Bliss ineffable imprints its radiance on the bard of lustrous utterances, and in the lisping language of the babes, he communicates in this last of the cantos in Tiruvachakam that the stream of life runs clear and pure, and that there is nothing lost and nothing gained. Dear is man and dearer is this world to him. Who can dare say that he knows? No one Knows. There is continuity, from everlasting to everlasting. There is neither a beginning nor end. The Present lives in the Past, the Past in the Present, and all is Truth.

In order to make these utterances of his Master intelligible, Manivachakar speaks in the bashful voice of Love. He reviews his life experiences good and bad, and finds that they are all valuable fragments of realisation — even his fiery struggles against the ways of the flesh. The main theme in the closing canto of Tiruvachakam is the wondrous healing power of divine Grace.

> "Who can gauge the height and depth of the Bliss
> That flowed into my soul from the smile of the Lord?"

Man may explore different vistas and pursue varying objects of desire. The poet recalls his own early associations with men of erudition, philosophers, and fiery-tempered

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youth who chased evanescent objectives in life till the Guru appeared in his horizon. With His coming, he learnt the one and only way to 'Mukti' was through Love. It was His Grace that made this dedication, this revelation possible to the saint and if it was possible to St. Manivachakar, would it not be possible to one and all mankind? Therefore he sings of the immeasurable glory of His Grace. At the close of his journey's end, his voice becomes calm and gentle, sure and steady.

"Long I strove with the ignoramus, dense to Truth,
Till He opened the vista of Love: my ills of yore
And bonds that beguiled the mind, He reft asunder.
Thus My Father transmuted me into His likeness —
Ah! who would gain His Grace in this measure?
Salutation in wonderment!"

51. 1.

Manivachakar extols the glory of his soul's realisation of the final Bliss or Mukti. The soul is set free from the influence of the threefold 'bonds', through the gift of the divine Grace, and having attained illumination rises on wings of love to live eternally in the conscious and full enjoyment of Siva's presence, in everlasting bliss. The saint chases all the vain deluding joys and misguided duties that cross the path of man, and awakens him from his stupor, so that he will be in readiness to receive the welcome rains of Grace. Only then shall man liberate himself for ever from the weariness of existence.

"Benumbed by the pangs of sorrow I stood;
Then gained I the light of thy healing Grace".

Man cannot pride himself about his triumphant victories, neither can he attain the full stature of his being by his own efforts. The Master-Guru needs must enlighten him and extend the protection of His Grace.

"Fleeting is my body. Fleeting too are my attachments". How was the soul cleansed of these external dross? The great Physician treated my ailments with tenderness, as he would treat a paralytic patient whose power of resistance was low. He assuaged the patient's suffering with his soothing massage of love. When the patient was relieved of

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pain, then He initiated him into the secrets of spiritual health. The Source of Excellence (Omkaram) can be discovered by one who follows the path of Love. 51. 7. In 'Acho-Padigam', the poet has given significant expression to an experience remote from human comprehension. Fully steeped in humanity and Love, Manivachakar recalls the lowest step from where he began his journey of life, and gazes in wonder from the summit of Truth which he has at last attained!

> "My divine Mother bestowed on me Her Love,
> Exalted me as one with some Significance,
> Like a dog that's uplifted to a palanquin.
> Who's so blessed? Salutation in wonderment."
>
> 51. 9.

CHAPTER XXIX

INTEGRAL RELATIONSHIP

SIVA RAJYA IN TIRUVACHAKAM

Indian poets conceived poetry as a kind of philosophy touched with emotion. The poet is the prophet of the world's final causes; the interpreter of creation groaning and travailing after its proper meanings. The poet sees the infinite Truth in his most exalted and entranced moods and spends his less exalted moments in giving form and expression to his realisations. The ideal of poesy wherein song and self-realisation become one in joy is of the essence of Indian conception of the mission of art. It is in the fitness of things that aesthetic delight and spiritual bliss are expressed by the suggestive word "Rasa". In India is found the golden link between Poetry, Religion and Philosophy.

Tiruvachakam gives us not merely a coherent system of Philosophy which in later years came to be known as "Saiva Siddhanta", but also the individual throb of emotional realisation, in which by means of that system, a man feels he understands and can love the inmost reality of things. The

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poet's feeling of the truth of what he experienced seems interfused with the poem's values. Manivachakar lived in the centre of the religious tradition of "Saivism", and his poem contains conceptions as are taken over from the religious beliefs of his day, yet its poetic value rests on the release of the personal and emotional experience of the poet.

Tiruvachakam is unique because universal types of experience and images of almost universal range are realised in fullness through the medium of poetry, and the poet's direct experience has significant relations to religion and philosophy. In our study of the poem, we have tried to show that approach through poetry can bring new light to bear upon the great truths that appear in religious experience.

What is the sum total of the spiritual heritage communicated by Manikkavachakar? Do the thought and imagery in Tiruvachakam constitute a satisfying expression of the permanent vital experience of the Saint? However one may try to avoid the personal note, and attempt to analyse one's own response by the judgment of others, yet it is the testimony of individual feeling that one must in the end put forward. That we may participate in the "Truth and Beauty" of Tiruvachakam, we must be emotionally responsive to the philosophy through which the attitudes and imagery of the poet's experience are evoked.

The intimate relationship of the Lord with the soul of man forms the quintessence of the poetry and philosophy of Tiruvachakam. The truth of the "Siddhantic Advaita" is immortalised by Manikkavachakar in his poem. God's relation to the soul can be likened to that of the letter A to the other letters; and it is a direct relation. His relation with the world is through, and for the soul. God is one with and yet different from the souls, as is the soul in relation to its body or organs. Saiva Siddhanta interprets the famous Upanishadic term 'advaita' as meaning 'ananya'. It is a non-dual relationship between two things which are inseparably connected, like fire in wood, ghee in milk, juice in fruit, and oil in gingelly. In many of the Tiruvachakam lyrics, we find this relationship stated beautifully.

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The transition from the human to the divine, from time to the eternal, from the many to the one, and similar experiences of the poet are interpreted by the emotional symbolism liberated by the power of Manikkavachakar's poetry. The poet resorts to allegories, metaphors and similes direct and implied, proverbial sayings and deviations in poetic craftsmanship as the change of metre and form of address (Swabadesam and Annyabadesam), devices of sending messages through kuyil and parrot, adopting the folklore of the peasants, or the technique of "Ahaturai" (love poetry) and symbolism and imagery current during his day as well as gleaned from the puranas and scriptures, in order to evoke the right feelings of the yearning of every man to realise his true goal.

We have analysed the way in which the poet has built up and elaborated with recurrences, a symphony in which God, soul and world participate and mingle in their true relationship. In Manivachakar's words, his poem is a magnificent garland of praise to the supreme Reality.

> "Accept in Grace, this garland of poesy —
> Glory, Glory be to Thee."
>
> IV. The Garland of Praise.

> "Let us extol Him by a thousand names,
> He who has neither name nor form".
>
> II. Tiru Tellenum.

In Tiruvandappahuthi is described the nature of the world which undergoes the process of birth, development and decay. The universe is controlled by an intelligent Being. "He is the supreme One who exists in the minutest atoms". He is the 'Ancient One' who causes the process of Involution and Evolution through His Sakti which operates by manifesting in many forms. The subordinate agents of creation, preservation and dissolution are all animated by Him: iii. 13-15.

In Tiruvachakam, we find constant references to the fact that the Gods entrusted with the world processes of Creation, Protection and Destruction do not know Siva, the source of Bliss. At the end of the Involution, He who remains unaffected by it, He is the supreme Author. "He discerns the aeon and its end, He is the Eternal Source of all".

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"He is the God of Gods, not perceived by the King of Gods (Indra)
He is the Supreme King of the Triad, who create, sustain and destroy the worlds.
He is the Murti (the manifest God), the ancient ancestor, my father and Siva-Sakti (5. 3. 30)

Thus Pati-Lakshana is rendered in Tiruvachakam in the most exalted poesy.

Siva-Rajya is the establishment on earth of the universal law of Truth, Love and Bliss and communicated by the devoted saints, men of God who had dedicated their lives on earth to Lord Siva, He who energises the worlds, animate and inanimate.

"Thou art the Heaven; Thou art the Earth;
Thou art the Wind; Thou art the Light;
The Body Thou; the soul art Thou;
Existence, Non-existence Thou;
Thou art the King; these puppets all
Thou dost move dwelling within, so that
Each one says; 'Myself and Mine';
What shall I call Thee? How render Praise?"
Tiruchadakam: 2|15.

In "Tiruvandappahuthi", Manikkavachakar sings of the Lord's splendour in filling every object in the universe, inseparably like the fragrance in the flower.

"Like fragrance of the flower wafting everywhere,
Thy greatness pervades all things vast and small."
3. 115.

That the world and the soul of man are eternal is the belief of Manikkavachakar. The soul is an intelligent entity. The mind and the senses help to energise the intelligence of the soul, and the organs of activity make the soul active. When joined to the body, it is completely identified with the body. When united to the Lord, it is completely identified with the Lord. Thus it identifies itself with anything that comes into contact with it. The soul's intelligence is rendered dormant by the bond of darkness called 'Anavam', and in the process of births, the instruments of the soul help to remove it in part.

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When the soul acts in the body, the good and the bad results of its deeds are termed Karma. Maya which provides the agents for the development of the soul, does not help the soul to understand the Lord beyond its ken. The finite cannot perceive the Infinite. Therefore Maya is viewed as a bond, because it limits the soul's vision. The soul in combination with Anavam and Maya directs its actions, not always in the right way. The poet compares the might of delusion to the tempestuous billows. 34. 6. Thus the soul gets entangled in the mesh of its deeds, and 'Karma' is thus said to be one of the bonds. 26. 8. "I mistook as delightful this hovel (body) with dense darkness and the result of strong deeds". Hence we find that Anava, Maya and Karma are said to be the three bonds of the soul which should be got rid of, if the soul should realise bliss. 48. 2.

This is the picture of our 'bhakta' as he appeared before the initiation by his Sat-Guru at Perunturai. The dawn of true wisdom breaks the shackles of the five senses and Manivachakar takes the name of Panchakshara, 'Namasivaya' — the name of the sacred glory, the name of Lord Siva, the word of Life.

"Lonely, tost by life's storms, in anguish sore
On the great sea of birth with none to aid,
Disturbed by carnal delights like ripened fruit,
I lay entrapped in jaws of the sea-monster lust!
Henceforth what way to 'scape?' oft I cried! Then
seiz'd I the raft of Thy Five Letters!
O Primal One, Thou showed me a boundless fertile shore,
and made me, a rash insensate one, Thine own!"

Tiruchadakam: 3. 27.

To ward against the danger of falling into the abyss of Prapancha, the delusion of the world — the soul should strive to get nearer the light of God. The end of meditation is release from Pasubhava, the state of bondage, in which there is attachment to caste, creed and condition. In looking upon the Lord as other than the self, the soul has necessarily to be thought of as limited. One has to meditate therefore on oneself as free from these trammels and as identical with the glorious, independent and blissful Siva.

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THE QUESTIONING MAN

In Tiruvachakam, we find a philosophy and religion based on reason, revelation and verification by personal experience. Manikkavachakar asks a number of questions in his poem on the purpose of man's life on earth, who he is and wherein lies his ultimate goal hereafter, and these live in our memory and haunt us by tugging at our heart strings. He puts several questions to his own self, addresses God in varied tones, tunes his challenge alternatively from the world of matter to that of the spirit. Questions like — "who am I, what is my relationship to my soul, and to the world, who can know me, of what service are we to Thee", — lead up to the great question he puts forward in his poem, "Who are they who can know God?" Pattinattadigal says in one place:

"In the tiny hair that grows in clusters,
In the surface skin that spreads and saves,
In the flesh beneath, sore and ruddy,
In the gushing blood that streams within,
....In ceaseless ills that cleave to the heart,
In all I searched in vain;
I found not self, nor know it is what.....
Oh God, whose part is Sakti! Lord of Ganga!
The lustrous Light with benign Grace
Pierces the murky clouds of Maya and bestows
Wisdom true for me to receive:
And all Thy Glory, when I thus perceive,
That Self is known and a sigh I heave".

The Supreme Being as "Pati" (Lord) is impelled by His own attribute of Grace (sakthi) or Tiru Arul to embark on His 'panchakrityas' — the five-fold activities of creation, preservation, destruction, involution, and revelation. To do this, He takes suitable forms in the "rupa, rupa-arupa and arupa" states. It is His own Sakthi that furnishes these Forms to Him. His Sakthi is conceived of as Jnana, Love, and Grace which are among the pure attributes of the Supreme — attributes beyond the fold of the three gunas sattva, rajas and tamas, experienced by embodied souls. 41. 4.

God cannot be realised with the aid of the mind or the senses. The lens of the world cannot perceive the Infinite

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One, who pervades the world. He can be realised only through His divine Grace and Wisdom. The soul can know Him only if it turns its gaze to the light of God. In short, God can be realised only through 'His Grace'. 38. 7. When the soul turns away from the world and ceases to live a purely objective existence and turns towards God, it reaches the stage when the Grace of the Lord can operate on it. It becomes aware of the corruptible nature of the Ego:

> "I am false; my mind is false; false too is my love;
> Yet if I weep, shall not this sinner attain Thee?"
>
> 5. 9. 94.

It is here that God's Grace begins to act upon the soul who is then able to realise the Lord.

> "I did not deserve anything better: Truly I was false:
> But when Thou with gentle glance bade me come,
> My sufferings ceased".
>
> 5. 10. 97.

THE GOD-GURU

In such a stage appears the Sat Guru to give man 'Icha' or love and spiritual illumination, as was bequeathed to Manivachakar at Perunturai. He reveals Himself also as the indwelling light within, Jnana, as at Tirukalukunram. The poet hailed the vision of the cosmic Dancer as Ananda or Bliss, as symbolised at Tillai. Thus the work of Grace in the different stages of his spiritual experience, has been expressed in many a lyric in Tiruvachakam:

> "Was it by penance that I received the initiation of
> 'Sivayanama'?
> .....Of His own accord He came and in grace took His
> abode in my heart."
>
> 38. 10.

When the grace of the Lord turns towards the souls, it is called Adi-Sakthi or Tirodhana Sakthi, which is praised by our poet in his Morning Hymn (20). When Love flows from the Supreme Being to help souls, this aspect of His Grace is called Icha Sakthi (Love) as testified in all the Odes of Perunturai. When the Lord takes cognizance of the fruits of Karma which souls have to experience, He works from with-

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in the heart of man as Jnana Sakthi (Wisdom). The poet experienced this presence at the Eagle Mount as seen from his Ode on Tirukalukunram (30). When He wills to provide the means and the environments for the enjoyment by souls of the fruits of their Karma, His Sakthi is known as Kriya Sakthi (active principle) and Manivachakar's hymns on the cosmic Dancer at Tillai bear witness to this aspect. In Achopadigam (51) and the Garland of Joy (50) Manivachakar extols Grace as it is in itself, as Jnana or Para-Sakthi and experienced by him in the days of bliss at Tillai. The relation between Sivam and Sakthi is that they are inseparable and stand in the relation of substance and attribute. To sum up, God's knowledge, grace and power are known as His Sakthi.

God performs the five-fold action (Panchakritya) because of his inherent infinite compassion to redeem souls from the bonds of mala — the principle of darkness — which holds them in its grip. Of these five actions, "srishti" (creation) is the first. It is meant to make the bonds of 'pasa' fit for dissolution in due time, by creating the necessary bodies, organs and environments required for each soul. The second activity is "sthithi". It is meant to protect or preserve for a time the created things, so as to enable the souls to enjoy the fruits of their action, and thus get rid of them. "Samhara" is the third activity which consists in dissolution of bodies and worlds in order to give rest to the wearied souls, and help them to get rid of the fatigue of their births and deaths. The fourth act is "Thirobhava", which means concealment of the Lord from the gaze of the soul until it steadily enjoys the fruits of Karma, and at the same time makes sufficient progress in spiritual knowledge and longing for union with the Lord, rejecting the Pasa which has been holding it so far in bondage. The last act is known as 'anugraha' — bestowal of ineffable bliss on the aspirant soul after it has become fully qualified to feel at one with the Lord and enjoy His 'Ananda', infinite joy. It is only when we understand the above import of the Dance of Siva at Tillai, that we can fully appreciate Manivachakar's ecstasy in the Tillai Odes.

God and soul belong to one category in so far as both are chit (intelligent being) and have iccha (emotion), jnana

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(intellect), and kriya (will) sakthi. Constantly Manikkava-chakar alludes to differences between himself and God. The difference is in three respects: Firstly God ever remains Pure and untainted by malas whereas the soul is tainted —

"In bondage of deeds and ignorance I lay stupefied;
'The Vanquisher of all bondage am I', and so saying
Thou mad'st Thyself known to me and made me Thine."

v. 3. 26.

Secondly, God undergoes no change in His condition, attributes and powers but the soul is from the beginning covered by mala (principle of ignorance), and passes through various conditions. 2. 109-112.

Thirdly, God is ever all-knowing and omniscient, whereas the soul though capable of knowing can know only with God's help. 20. 9.

"Aided by His Grace divine, at His Feet I prostrate".

1. 18.

"We know this much that He is one-less, belonging to no place and is incomparable and peerless: that He is of this manner, form and colour, with eyes of His Grace alone, can one see. Beyond this, His form, nature and being, not in any word or picture are truly writ". Manikkavachakar extols His glory in many poems:

"Thou dwellest in all the elements, yet 'tis said;
That Thou go'est not nor come'st; .....
To ponder on Thee is hard for human thought:
To us in Presence come! Cut off our ills!
In mercy make us Thine."

20. v.

When the soul thus fixes itself in this state, identifying with Siva, it should perceive its actions to be those of the Lord unceasingly, as it will not act, except with His Grace, and in consequence ignorance and Karma will not enter it. When the soul attributes all actions to Him, it loses its own identity. The soul's individuality is merged in that of the Lord. The soul converts its 'Iccha, Jnana and Kriya', into those of the Lord. The soul becomes one with God in 'Mukti' or freedom of being, as God is one with the soul in its ignorant condition. So tunefully does our poet express this idea:

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"Though Ether, Wind, Fire, Water, Earth should fail,
His constant being fails not, knows no weariness!
In Him my body, thought and soul are merged —
On the extinction of 'meself', sing we, and beat Tellenam!".
11. 18.

It is not enough for the soul to become one with God, but it must also consider its actions as those of the Lord.

CHAPTER XXX

BLOSSOMS OF ILLUMINATION

THE SYMPHONY OF LIFE AND LOVE

Questions on the goal of human existence, the means of attaining it, and the nature of life in the state of spiritual freedom are elucidated in Tiruvachakam. In the ode on Tiruchadakam (5) it is said that Man by the grace of a Guru begins seriously to enquire about the whence and the whither of himself and of the world, and about the means of attaining freedom from the imperfections of human life and of becoming one with the Supreme Being. Several births are required before man can reach the final goal. He has to practise several disciplines to build up a good and strong character. He has to achieve purity in body, thought, word and deed. He has to learn to refrain from evil and to try to do good to others.

Manivachakar experienced God as Supreme Love and that Love was also identical with the supremacy of Law. A spiritual aspirant had to cultivate love of God and worship Him in all sincerity and humility (Vide Ode of Tiru Empavai). Such worship was acceptable to God. Without great love and devotion to God, no amount of penance would take the worshipper to the highest goal. God is the nearest to us, and should be felt as the dearest to us as well.

Profound gratitude for all His mercies shown to man through aeons, mercies unsought and unasked, melts the heart of St. Manivachakar. And the realisation that He is love,

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that He is our Eternal Father and Mother, and that the highest gift of Love is to become merged in the Lord, will spur mankind down the ages to quicken their pace in their march on the path of Bhakti. Such union with the Supreme will also mean freedom from all imperfections and conferment of eternal bliss. This is the burthen of the Lyric of Flaming Love (37).

"My wealth of Bliss, my Lord Siva!
I cling fast to Thee — Wherefore can'st Thou leave me?"

When man yearns for a vision of God, for communion and union with Him, the Lord appears in suitable forms to his Bhaktas, as seen by Manivachakar in Tirupperunturai, Tirukalukunram and Tillai.

In the later lyrics written at Tillai, Manivachakar had ceased to crave and beg for Grace. He had attained At-One-ment. How do we prove it? If man realises that all the activities of all insentient and sentient creatures in the Universe are really the activities of God, then he stands one with God. His very body and his physical and mental apparatus will be transformed as they become instruments of God. When thus 'anava' becomes powerless to attack, 'maya' and 'karma' will also become incapable of disturbing the purified soul. When in this manner the soul has got rid of the influence of anava, karma, and maya, the vision of the Grace of God will dawn, followed by the vision of Sivam, as manifested in the Odes on Tiru Tellenum, Tiru Empavai, Eagle Mount and the Testament of Attainment.

In the Temple Lyric (22), the soul sees the infinite compassion of the Lord, and the manner in which He has been helping the soul all through its stages of evolution — from its 'kevala avastha' right up to the 'suddha avastha', — by ever remaining in union with it, by helping the soul to see and by seeing Himself as well, and by promoting activity calculated to wear out the bonds of 'pasa'. The realisation of this infinite compassion and love of the Supreme melts the heart of St. Manivachakar, freed as he is from 'pasa'. Overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude, he loves the Lord intensely — Vide Ode on Dedication (33) and Prayer (32). These are some of the most plaintive strains in the whole range of religious poesy.

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"I have donned the Lord's Feet: I shall not lose my way.
Never will I loosen it again."

THE TESTIMONY OF THE REALISED

A Jivan Mukta is one who has obtained mukthi (freedom) while still in the body. Only active and intense love will fructify into infinite bliss, which is "Siva Bhoga or Sivananda". Without such love for God, there can be no 'Ananda'. Love leads to bliss. The great Siva Jnani that St. Manikkavachakar is, he addresses the Lord endearingly as "Oh Bliss! Oh my Love!" in the Temple Lyric (22).

'My Ambrosia, nectar insatiable,
Flawless Gem, distilled honey!'

In the last Odes of Tiruvachakam, we see the Jivan mukthas merging in the love for, and bliss of the Supreme Sivam. They see nothing but God in all things around them. They have no caste or creed. They behave like children and act sometimes like mad men. They are found singing and dancing in ecstasy. They stand fixed in union with the Supreme, and nothing in the world can effectively drag them down. They enjoy the vision and bliss of the Supreme, even when they are in the waking state.

How beautifully the poet has brought out the force of the idea of God's wisdom and activity through Grace, by means of the concept, 'the lotus feet of the Lord'. Throughout Tiruvachakam, the symbolic terms of the "holy feet, beauteous feet, roseate feet, kingly feet, gracious feet," are applied with equal felicity to reveal the greatest truth of Saiva Siddhanta i.e., the doctrine of the Grace of God. The concept of the Gracious Feet of the Lord is rich with the promise of all that is most blessed.

"His roseate feet, this earth hath trod".
"When His flowery Feet were placed on my head
Such divine bliss was mine — Sing we".
"He gave His Feet as refuge and banished my care,
His gracious acts, we praise".

Thus the symbol unfolds the beauty of absolute submission of the soul, in which state it remains perfectly free and

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happy, freed for ever from the affliction of change and decay, birth and death.

"Oh, Thou who purgeth me of my evil ways!
Know Thou that I have no other attachment
Except that of Thy holy Feet."

28. 9.

Manivachakar's love soars on intense feeling of Bhakti in the song "Be Thou my Refuge" (24). His thirst for the living waters of Grace was so great that when he was given the ambrosial drink divine, he quaffed it to choking point and struggled. Then he called on the Flawless Gem to save him from perishing. 24. 10.

The concept of the "Feet of God" is the nearest we can get to the reality of the intimate relationship of God with man. It makes us concentrate on the one eternal Truth of God's Transcendency and Immanence. Through His five-fold acts, He energises the world and the heart of man. In Tiru Empavai lyric, the poet unfolds the truth underlying the manifested and unmanifested ways of Grace, symbolised in the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

"Hail thy flowery Feet, Thou Transcendent One.
Hail thy roseate Feet, Thou Immanent One.
Hail thy golden Feet, Thou source of Life.
Hail thy blossoming Feet, Thou joy of Life.
Hail thy twain Feet, Thou goal of Life.
Hail thy lotus Feet, unseen by Mal and Brahma.
Hail resplendant blooms of Grace that made us His".

7. 20.

The whole poem of Tiruvachakam breathes of the spirit of dedication where the poet offers himself absolutely at the feet of divine Grace, and supplicates for the inseparable union in the bliss of God.

"That my lonely self may cease to feel forlorn,
Grant me Thy Feet".

(5. 7. 72.)

THE BEATIFIC BLISS

In the poem on the "Testament of Attainment" (49) and the last two odes of Tiruchadakam 9 & 10, Manivachakar

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gives us a clear conception of 'mukti' (Release), which consists in becoming united to the Feet of the Lord. The soul is in full enjoyment of the bliss of the Supreme. Its separate existence continues, though its *nature* is transmuted. 'Pasa' also continues to exist, though its power to bind the released souls has become extinct. In a subtle sense Manivachakar conveys the suggestion, that it aids the attained soul in the enjoyment of the Divine Bliss. Perhaps this is the significance of the meaningful question, 'shall it not be?' in the Testament of Attainment. The Way of Liberation (Mukti-Neri) lies in the unfoldment of that which is the Real in the soul (pasu) and the objective consciousness (pasa) before the Feet of the Lord. The soul which has attained this 'para-mukti' will remain immersed in the enjoyment of supreme bliss.

"My Compassionate Father! Thou transmuted me
In Grace, into Thy likeness in Bliss".

51. 1.

That the Lord transmutes the realised soul into His 'Swarupa' has been sung by the saints Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manivachakar.

"Every part of me, He fills with love and bliss supreme,
He makes all my actions, His actions,
Seeing through His compassion, we see the Father in
all things around,

And so play we Thonokkam".

15. 6. 23-24.

The advaita relation becomes complete when the Lord takes into His Own the self-less love of the soul, and the soul in turn merges into the boundless Grace of Siva.

"Though it has attained to the knowledge of everything,
The 'Knower' knows nothing but the known".

(Tiruvarutpayan).

The Kingdom of Mukti is not an external state; it is indeed a revelation of an ecstatic state from within which defies analysis. Manivachakar in his Tillai odes strikes a note of caution and stipulates the need to maintain steadfast communion with the Lord. In the Ancient Temple Lyric (21) he prays for the society of hallowed devotees, whose hearts

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are filled to the brim with love of Siva and in the ode on Tiru Ammanai (8) he urges the contemplation of every Siva-bhakta, every form manifested in the temples, nay, every living being as the form of Siva, the Beloved, the Supreme Being.

'Bestow on me thy Divine Grace
That I look upon all living beings
In love as self of Self'.

TO THE LISTENING WORLD COMES THE WORD

Manivachakar is a seer of Truth, the apostle of Love, the servant and bhakta of Siva. As the 'chosen vessel' of the Supreme Siva, he has poured forth in soul-stirring strains, his own spiritual experiences. Tiruvachakam is a beauteous, fadeless floral garland of poesy, sung in the sweetest diction in Tamil, and these hymns breathe the unison of Divine Love and Bliss with the soul of man, as experienced by the Siva-jnani St. Manivachakar at every split second of his existence. He realised the Supreme Being in the Swarupa state and merged with 'Sivam' within and without. He shares his vision of Love with us and his irresistible clarion call for ever tugs at our hearts' strings. The fervour of his communication evokes in us a spontaneous response to listen to him, at the going down of the sun and in the morning. How tenderly he calls and waits for us:

"Will ye not come this day and be His own?
Will ye not prostrate, bow, worship and adore?
Ye have strayed afar. Ah, who would care for you?
Ye who are bewilder'd and stand confounded —
If ye seek for perfect wisdom, come to Him,
and Ye would gain on earth the everlasting
Grace Of Sacred Puyangan, Siva our King,
Ah, haste, Oh, haste and join our pilgrim band.

45. 10.

If we do not pay heed to his benign call but linger in worldly entanglements, he is not going to wait indefinitely for us. The moving finger of the pilgrim-poet writes on:

"Let those that waver stay on — we shall not loiter
In a world that is evanescent; so let us march on."

45. 7

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The Siva Jnanis (illumined Sages) are the walking Temples. They form the sacred Legion of the Holy Order of Siva. They are the real living testament of Siva who transcends thought, conception and perception. Behold their triumphant procession wending towards the final Goal of Siva, the Supreme One.

"Strike the mighty drum of the Guru,
Wielder of wisdom's sword:
Spread the white canopy over the Guru,
Who mounts the charger of heaven;
Enter and take each of you the armour
Of holy ash, fragrant, divine;
Possess we the heavenly fortress,
Where hosts of illusion come not!

46. 1.

Ye faithful soldiers — march on in the van;
Ye Devout ones, move on to the flanks:
Ye sages of power illustrious —
Come fill up the swelling ranks;
Ye Mystics of strength unfailing, —
advance and close up the rear;
We shall possess the heavenly land,
No hosts of evil shall ever assail."

46. 2.

THE BEATITUDE OF ADVAITA UNION

The quintessence of Tiruvachakam lies in the message of "Love one another, for Ye are members of one another". "Ye must love thy fellowmen not only as thyself but as the epitome of Siva Himself, the Supreme Being". Tiruvachakam teaches us *how* to love and discover God in others; for according to Manivachakar, every living being is gleaming with the radiant smile of the Lord of Tillai.

"Long have I yearned to see that elusive smile
Playing on Thy sweet mien, my Essence Divine".

25. 6.

It is this love of frail human beings that finally snaps the cord that binds the soul to the cycle of births, and in the snapping of that cord lies eternal Bliss. Bliss means, becom-

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ing one with God in a non-dual sense, i.e. in Advaita state. This is the real At-one-ment. What happens to the soul in Bliss? The Testament of Attainment reveals that the soul is inseparably united to God. The egoism of the soul is completely destroyed and its whole being pulsates through and through with Divine Wisdom. The Soul becomes SIVA-MAYAM but not SIVA HIMSELF. The soul becomes as if it were, a star caught in a flood of sun-light or like salt dissolved in water. In fact that ecstatic final state is to be felt and experienced by each one for himself and not to be spoken of.

The advaita relation of God and the perfected soul is like the advaita relation existing between fragrance and flower.

> "Thy glorious splendour whom none can experience
> Save those that love!
> His pure blossom Feet like a luminous jewel
> Adorns my head".
>
> 42. 1.

God who is immanent as the fragrance in the lotus flower of the heart of every man, cannot be perceived except by those who love Him, as the sun's light is beheld only by the light of our eyes. The pure, ineffable light of wisdom will penetrate through and the illuminated soul will be in advaitic union with the effulgent light of God and so enjoy bliss infinite. The symbolism of Light occupies a unique place in Tiruvachakam, particularly in relation to 'Advaita'. In the first place, the Lord is addressed in manifold terms of light throughout the poem:

> "The ray that surpasseth speech and content!"
> "The effulgent radiance that gleamed in the sea of devotion."
> "The sun that illumines my inner self."

From our response to light comes the realisation of God in His transcendental glory, and in His immanent benignity with the world and soul. The Light of the Sun becomes a symbol of supreme well-being, the factor of heightened vitality blended with the subtler cravings of the spirit. As the soul ascends higher and higher, brighter and brighter becomes the heavenly radiance; the light of God dispels the darkness of ignorance. The God-Guru appears to a bhakta as the Light

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of truth and the Light of wisdom and frees him from the pangs of birth.

"Beauteous Light, that cut off my bonds of life —
Pain, birth, death and delusion too".

37. 10.

Here the concentration of dazzling light implies the great glory of God who can cut away our attachments. The realisation of infinity is presented in terms of diffused light.

"All-pervasive through earth, heaven and other worlds,
Oh, Thou expanse of light that spreads o'er all".

22. 8.

An emotional response to the Lord's ineffable bliss is evoked in the following line:

"Weary I feel, seeking Thy gleam of fadeless bliss".

32. 1.

The poet makes one of the contacts of poetry with religion when he brings the transcendent God into relation with man as an object of intellectual recognition in the lines:

"O Splendour of Light! O resplendent flame!
O Lamp that sheds effulgent beams.

29. 1.

"Thou that changeth all to ecstatic bliss
My light divine!"

22. 8.

The reality of the soul, the relative freedom of the human will, the essentially ordered nature of the world — all these are features of permanent value in the poetry of Tiruvachakam. The unique achievement of Manivachakar is to have translated philosophy into the living accents of Poetry. His poem is a Testament of Love, wherein we discern the sway of Siva-Rajya on earth—the Kingdom of perfected human relationship. St. Manikkavachakar is a unique Poet and Seer who gave to the world a unique poem. He gives the key to open the doors of Love and harmony among the people, transcending religious, political, communal and all other considerations. This is the greatness of the real spirit and essence underlying Tiruvachakam. It is a Universal Song of Love which embodies in the most intense and complete form of

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emotional realisation, the 'incantation' of a Living faith — a testament of "Advaita", and a vision of Siva Rajya on earth.

"Thou incomparable One! Thou that art
The Light of my soul, Thy bondsman —
On me who knew not the *true* goal,
Thou hast bestowed Grace, O Love unique!
O radiant Form whose splendour none can tell!
My wealth of Bliss! O Siva Peruman!
In weariness, I've seized Thee, hold Thee fast.
Whither in Grace can'st Thou part from me?"

37. 5.

".....Said Mal and Ayan,
'Tis time we went to earth and there were born.
Tis on earth alone that Siva's Grace is wont to save.'
Thou King who dwell'st in Perunturai's shrine,
Great Thou wert to enter earth, and make us Thine!
Thou and the Grace that blooms from Thy Form,
Nectar divine! Arise to bequeath Thy Grace!"

20. 10.

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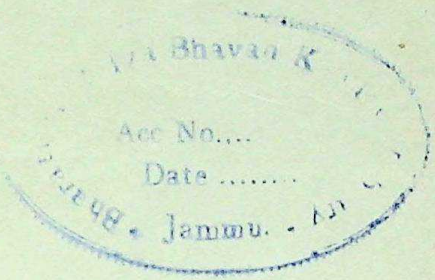

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(a) Mumbadevi Sanskrit Pathashala, for specialized Shastric studies; (b) Devidas Lallubhai Pathashala, for preliminary Shastric and Sanskrit studies; (c) Nagardas Rughnathdas Jyotish Shikshapith for specialized study of Indian Astrology and Astronomy, and (d) Purushottam Thakkar Vedashala for Vedic studies.

Examinations Conducted

For the Bhavan's diplomas (recognised by the Government of Bombay) of Shastri, Acharya and Vachaspati in Sahitya, Vyakarana, Vedanta, Jyotish.

Facilities

Free tuition to all and free boarding and lodging or scholarships to all deserving students.

2. GITA VIDYALAYA:

An Academy for the study of Indian Culture with special reference to the *Bhagavad Gita*. Classes conducted at the Bhavan and 19 centres. Examinations for the Gita Vid and Gita Visharad Diplomas are conducted and scholarships, medals and prizes are given to successful candidates.

3. MUNGALAL GOENKA SAMSHODHAN MANDIR:

A Post-graduate & Research Institute recognised by the University of Bombay for research for Ph.D. & M.A.

Departments

(a) Sanskrit Shikshapith; (b) Singhi Jain Sahitya Shikshapith; (c) Narmad Gujarati Shikshapith; (d) Bhagavad Dharma Shikshapith.

Facilities

Scholarships and free guidance to deserving scholars.

4. BHARATIYA ITIHASA VIBHAG: (Dept. of Indian History)

Tha Bharatiya Itihasa Vibhag was organised in 1944. The Vibhag's 10-Volume scheme of "History & Culture of the Indian People" is a monumental work designed to give a comprehensive and authentic, balanced and up-to-date account of India's History and Culture through the ages.

5. MUNSHI SARASVATI MANDIR: (An Institute of Culture)

Departments

(a) *Library* with about 60,000 printed volumes, including rare indological volumes and a Children's section; (b) *Museum* consisting of ancient and valuable manuscripts, paintings, bronzes, etc.; (c) *All-India Cultural Essay Competition*; (d) *Bharatiya Sangit*

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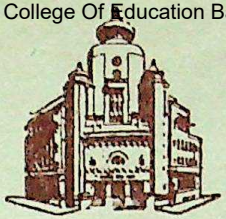

Shikshapith—An Academy of Music for teaching and conducting research in Music—affiliated to the National Academy of Hindustani Music, Lucknow, teaching for Intermediate and Graduate courses.

6. BHARATIYA KALA KENDRA—An Academy of Arts and Dramatics, including a School of Dancing.

7. MUDRAN AUR PRAKASHAN MANDIR:

As a first step towards establishing an Academy of Printing, Bhavan has acquired Messrs. Associated Advertisers & Printers —one of the biggest presses in Bombay.

(a) This department publishes the results of the research work of the Bhavan, the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad and the Munshi Sahitya; (b) *The Book University*—Under this scheme, books—ancient and modern—are published in a uniform size and at a low price with a view to make the best literature and classics of India and the world available to the common man in easily understandable form.

8. DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALS AND PERIODICALS:

Bhavan's Journal: English fortnightly devoted to life, literature and culture, was started in August, 1954.

Bharati: A Hindi monthly is being brought out since August, 1956.

Bharatiya Vidya: A research quarterly is also published by this Department.

9. M. M. COLLEGE OF ARTS & N. M. INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE:

This College of the Bhavan is affiliated to the University of Bombay for courses leading to B.A., B.Sc., M.A., M.Sc. and Ph.D. The College has a Gita Academy also.

Kendras outside Bombay

Bhavan has opened four centres in Delhi, Kanpur, Allahabad and Madras.

The Bhavan has also three centres outside India at Stuttgart in Germany, at California and at Brooklyn in New York.

Associated and Affiliated Institutions

(1) The Gujarati Sahitya Parishad; (2) The Gujarati Sahitya Sansad; (3) The Bombay Astrological Society; (4) The Bharatiya Stri Seva Sangh.

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THE AUTHOR

Ratna Navaratnam, born in a pious Hindu family known for its culture, has had a brilliant academic record at the Presidency College, Madras, Annamalai University and the Institute of Education, London. For over ten years she was the head of the Ramanathan College, Ceylon. She then joined Government service and is now Education Officer, Jaffna District.

Ratna Navaratnam was a delegate to the Geneva Conference for International Understanding in 1951. She is a Life Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, and an active member in many educational and cultural organisations. She has travelled widely in India, the United Kingdom and West Europe.

She has written several books for children. Her *New Frontiers in East-West Philosophies of Education* has done much to promote East-West understanding.

Inheriting a religious temperament from her father, Ratna came under the powerful spiritual influence of Maha Yogar Swamigal of Columbuturai. This set her on a deep study of Saiva Siddhanta books which resulted in her writing a thesis entitled *The New Approach to Tiruvachakam,* published by the Annamalai University in 1946. The present book is an elaboration of the theme based on the fullness of the spiritual experience she has had since in her quest for Immortal Beauty.

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